

THE TROUBLE IN SURINAME, 1975-1993

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Democracy Bent, but Not Broken

You're a "full citizen" if you are arrested by the police and charged in a normal manner. You're a "semi-citizen" if you live in Moengo, where there are no police but only the Jungle Commando. If the military police pick you up, you're "no citizen." That is, unless you're caught red-handed. There is also the "military citizen" with special privileges. Everything's OK for them. You can carry a weapon without a license. You can speak with authority on anything, and you can arrest whomever you want.

"Dingen van de dag"

De Ware Tijd, May 12, 1990

As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. But the most recent experiment with democracy in Suriname suggests that the interest in coming together to "put country first" was intermittent, at best, on the part of the principal actors. Other agendas took priority. The old parties, finally back in power, seemed to put self-preservation ahead of all else. The military, glad to shed some of the headaches of direct government, exhibited a minimal dedication to democracy after 1987, seeking instead to maximize their autonomy and what remained of their power. Their civilian ally, the NDP, with its curious amalgam of ideologically correct Marxism and unscrupulous obstructionism, was the only force that seemed to enjoy the democratic renaissance. But its tactics (and those of its military sponsor) were almost surely self-defeating.

Among the old behemoths, the NPS was the most tormented and unpredictable. Toward Bouterse many of its members felt the unreasoning wrath that one can feel only toward the betrayal by one of their own.

Bouterse, like many in the PNR, PNP, NMR, PALU, VP, RVP, and NDP, was a Creole whose first political home had been the NPS. Many had left the party because of unsatisfied ambition or new ideological persuasions; others, because of the NPS's corruption, rigidity, and narrow personalism. But the rank and file kept the faith. Bouterse's coup, his unrelenting persecution of Arron and other NPS officeholders, and his subsequent brutality toward the (mostly Creole) protest leaders in 1982 led many to seek more than just the military's ouster from power. Whether the NPS had a hand in sponsoring or encouraging the Brunswijk insurgency may never be known. But the behavior of many NPS members in and out of the National Assembly suggested that a desire for vengeance (as justified as it might be) was getting in the way of their handling the other business of state. More important, disagreements with their alliance partners on how to handle the military began to cripple the government.

The VHP was also somewhat torn, but by quite different forces. On the one hand, there were the wealthy traders who had managed to contrive new paths to wealth with the help of the military. On the other were the old *parliamentariers* whose interests were a combination of ethnic defensiveness (constituent services) and a narrow concern with procedural tactics, as opposed to any grand designs or planning. For Suriname, buffeted by dramatic struggles over power and direction, such behavior was the functional equivalent of burying one's head in the sand. Standing (or was it bending?) between these two factions was the party's and legislature's *Voorzitter* (Chairman), Lachmon. As the grand old man of Suriname's politics, he commanded a kind of automatic respect. But if he had a game plan of some kind, it was hard to decipher. As time passed, it seemed that buying time (waiting until their second term, presumably in 1993) was the Front's only goal.

Finally, there was the Jungle Commando. If its goal had been the restoration of democracy, why hadn't it proceeded to disband upon the Front's accession to power? Obviously there was a deeper grudge battle going on, with Brunswijk out to get Bouterse and all those responsible for the despoliation of the Bush Negroes. Ironically, the longer the rebels held out, the longer it would take for economic reconstruction to occur—in the interior and in the coastal economy. Dutch foreign aid, dedicated to benefit all inhabitants, would be held hostage to the guerrilla war. The Front government, too, was caught in this bind. And while the guerrillas were able to work out a deal with the Front, Bouterse's veto of it, and the coincidental emergence of a rival guerrilla band (closing, in effect, the rest of Suriname's interior) sent the prospects for economic development further into disarray.

In Suriname it took dozens, not two, to tango. And the steps for *this* dance had yet to be invented.

THE FRONT GOVERNMENT

One month each was allotted following the election to (1) the swearing in of the new National Assembly and (2) the selection of the new President and his government. The Front did not treat these as outside limits, permitting faster action, but took the full measure of time, as if putting together a coalition from scratch. The delay did not make much sense, given the urgency of getting to work on the economic and civil war issues.

Because he was the oldest elected representative, Jaggernath Lachmon automatically became Chairman *pro tempore* of the National Assembly, swearing in all the others. Even the ten representatives from the virtually depopulated interior districts were seated. Once this formality was concluded, Lachmon surprised a good many by choosing to retain the post of *Voorzitter* (Chairman or Speaker), turning down an offer of the presidency made by the NPS. But he was still clearly the boss. One could draw no other conclusion when he proposed a respected, but clearly nonpolitical, agricultural engineer, Ramsewak Shankar, for the presidency. The choice was accepted without a murmur of protest by the NPS and KTPI.

The idea of picking a fairly nonpolitical figure like Shankar as President may have seemed like an ingenious stroke to maximize the uncertain authority of the Front government. Shankar was clearly a figurehead compared with Lachmon and Arron (the latter about to become Prime Minister, or Vice President, in the new regime).¹ They were the ones with their hands most directly on the machinery of government and policy-making. With the "strong presidency" now consigned to a weak man, the *Staatsraad* (State Council) might be reduced from a kind of "upper house" to a mere ceremonial council. In fact, the Front delayed in setting up the *Staatsraad* for a year.²

All of this constituted a breach of the Leonsberg Agreement made the year before in August, at the start of the referendum and election campaigns. At that time Bouterse and the old party leaders had agreed on a power-sharing arrangement that would give Suriname a nonpartisan government much like the one it had going into the elections. The *Staatsraad* was supposed to carry on the function of the *Topberaad* (which had brought Bouterse, Lachmon, Arron, the unions, and other groups together) in a supervisory function over the executive. The Leonsberg Accord also supported the presidency of Frank Essed, a highly respected development planner and former NPS member, and the continuation of Jules Wijdenbosch as Vice President.

The landslide victory of the Front parties was apparently unexpected; because of its work with the people's committees and other grass-roots groups, the NDP expected more seats in urban areas, and ten seats were felt to be assured in the country's interior, depopulated thanks to the Bush Negro insurgency and thus open for manipulation. But with only three seats overall, the NDP was in no position to press the Front to honor the Leonsberg Accord.

The justification for power-sharing—the Front falling short of two-thirds control in the National Assembly (needed for election of the President and for changing the constitution)—did not obtain. Thus, the old parties simply cast the Leonsberg Accord aside. But when they did so, the NDP and military prepared for battle.

One issue upset the calm, deliberate approach of the Front: the provision of a ministerial post for the KTPI's leader, Willy Soemita. As pointed out in Chapter 2, Soemita had been arrested for "blatant" (as opposed to the more common "well-disguised") corruption. As an ex-convict, his presence in the new government seemed an embarrassment, at least to many NPS members. But there was no desire to repeat the events of 1978 and risk defection by the KTPI. Thus Soemita became not only Minister of Social Affairs but also Deputy Vice President (backing up Arron).

A second issue of some sensitivity was the selection of a new Minister of Defense with the responsibility of watching over the armed forces and Desi Bouterse. Lachmon and Arron finessed this nicely by putting a non-Front, non-Bouterse man in the role—Captain Achmed Sheikhhariem. Captain Sheikhhariem's rank was probably as irrelevant as his present civilian authority. But his knowledge of the military, stemming from his service before the coup, might be useful for oversight purposes. Captain Sheikhhariem aside, the parties divided their posts five each for the VHP and NPS, and two for the KTPI. Bouterse reportedly spent four hours with Shankar before giving the NDP approval to support him. However, in a promising show of *verzoening*, both Shankar and Arron were given a unanimous vote of support in the National Assembly. Just the same, to show that he still had a few opinions of his own and the readiness to utter them, Bouterse gave the Dutch government a tongue-lashing for its continued "violation of international law" and "support for international terrorism and mercenary war."

The past and the present, however, were both quick to press in on the new government. Within days of the inauguration, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights presented a report condemning the military for the atrocities at Moengo Tapoe and elsewhere between July and December 1986. On New Year's Day 1988, yet another group of Bush Negro noncombatants had been captured and executed near the Saramakaner village of Pokigron on the shores of the Brokopondo Lake, site of another attack three months earlier. One member of the group miraculously survived to implicate his killers—allegedly a unit of the National Army. Both the Dutch and the Americans denounced this latest atrocity, throwing the new government a stiff challenge even before it was formally inaugurated. The Military Police launched an investigation, promising that justice would be done if the men implicated were found to be guilty.

THE DUTCH AID IMBROGLIO

An offer by Dutch Premier Ruud Lubbers to mediate the conflict between Brunswijk and the Paramaribo authorities was flatly turned down by Bouterse, whereupon the Dutch began to show ever greater caution in the restoration of their development aid. Talks on this subject, they declared, would have to wait until the new government had presented its governmental program (*Regeringsverklaring*) to the National Assembly. At that time (March 12), Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek declared himself pleased with the program, authorized restoration of full diplomatic relations, and prepared to initiate negotiations over renewed aid in May. The aid stream, however, was *not* turned back on, apart from the humanitarian trickle begun in 1986.

Former Development Minister Jan Pronk stated that development aid would have to be "for the benefit of all Surinamers," implying that the civil war must end and refugees be returned to the interior before externally funded development could be considered. Even then, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* made it clear that no aid monies would be given to military-related programs. In what can only be considered angry retaliation, arsonists tried to burn down the KLM office in downtown Paramaribo, and when Foreign Minister Van den Broek arrived for talks in March 1988, nails were scattered in the path of his car. But two could play at that game. During the visit of Development Minister Bukman in May, arsonists burned down the headquarters of the military police on the grounds of Fort Zeelandia. If democracy was back, so were some of Suriname's more anarchic traditions.

Negotiations were complicated by Dutch demands for restructuring the CONS mechanism that approved the development projects to be supported. Rather than a fixed group of designated individuals from each country (with the capacity to become too cozy with one another and autonomous as a group), a rotation of accountable experts was called for on each side. Internationalization of the aid was also specified, in particular to provide the manpower Suriname evidently lacked to put together proper development plans. Arron denounced the internationalization idea as a Dutch attempt to escape their treaty obligations. Instead, he demanded \$275 million at the earliest opportunity for an *urgentieprogramma* of economic recovery. In addition, he demanded \$90 million compensation for the CONS-supported development projects that Suriname had carried to completion *after* the Dutch aid cutoff in December 1982. Bukman flatly refused to discuss the latter two issues and held to his conditions regarding the CONS. After several days of unyielding confrontation, the Dutch negotiators flew home. According to the *NRC-Handelsblad*, the Surinamers ended up with pledges for less than \$20 million—largely for food, medicine, and spare parts.

Sorting through the wreckage, Arron defended his government's stance. "They wanted us to forgo any major development and settle for small

projects," he said, "like manufacturing matches and toothpicks." But union leaders and businessmen accused the Surinamese negotiators of very sloppy work and having thrown their *urgentieprogramma* together without consulting anyone. In the editorial opinion of the *NRC-Handelsblad*, it seemed quite incredible that a \$275 million program could be drawn up on "two sheets of paper."³ An Salomonson, of that paper, reported that Finance Minister Subhas Mungra had been willing to accept the Dutch conditions, but that Arron had roundly rejected them.

First of all, because acceptance of unpopular measures such as these would put him politically into some danger [in his party]. Second, because the military commander, Desi Bouterse, would have nothing to do with them. And the reality of the Surinamese "democracy," unfortunately, is that the army is not under the control of the government; rather, the government rules by grace of the military.⁴

Bukman announced that there was still Nf 100 million in aid monies available for 1988, and it would not be tied to any internationalization requirements. Still, he urged the Surinamers to consider approaching the World Bank, if only for help in drawing up sensible development plans, given the lack of trained professional help in the country itself. Again in July the two parties negotiated and reached agreement in principle on aid flows of Nf 100 million for 1988, and Nf 200 million for each succeeding year to 1996 (roughly \$50 million and \$100 million, respectively). But there were three more conditions: Suriname must adopt some austerity measures (an *aanpassingsbeleid*, or adjustment policy) by October 1; it must submit a comprehensive, multi-year development plan (*meerjarenontwikkelingsprogramma*, MOP); and it must allow purchases to be handled by the Dutch Government Services Administration (*Rijksinkoopbureau*, RIB) to assure proper accountability.

Although internationalization was now dropped, it was still pointed out that the World Bank's experts could help by suggesting ways of applying the "austerity knife." All cuts would be painful, however. Inflation in 1987 was reported at 50 percent, unemployment as of October 1988 was 38 percent, over half of the economically active population was in government employ, and reserves had dropped to less than \$6 million in 1987. Hit by the perennial shortage of medical supplies, the Academic Hospital announced that it would close in November 1988—a drastic step that suddenly unlocked enough foreign exchange pledges by the government to reverse the decision. School uniforms and supplies for the 1988-89 school year were held up by the Ministry of Education's inability to take shipment.

The Nf 100 million in aid for 1988 were considered bridging funds (*overbruggingshulp*), according to Bukman, and would be counted separately from the treaty's promised development aid. But there were still two devilish conditions to be met: Suriname would have to solve the civil war, and it

would have to take the aid in goods and services, not in cash. Regarding the first condition, long-range (i.e., MOP) funding would still be conditioned upon its benefiting everyone, and there was no way the government could do this short of achieving peace with, or victory over, the Jungle Commando.

The second issue involved the role of the Dutch RIB in the monitoring of all imports to Suriname under the bridging aid program. There would be no more blank checks drawn by the CONS on the Dutch Treasury. Aid would henceforth be calculated in goods and services, the former handled by the RIB. A sign of the coming difficulties this would impose arose in relation to the first food orders under the bridging fund's program. Among the foods on the shopping list that the Arron government presented for emergency aid were sardines and Gouda cheese. While these might be basic to the Dutch diet, they were viewed as somehow extravagant for their former subjects. But Lachmon responded that it had been a long time since his countrymen had enjoyed such basic Dutch treats. They were necessary, he thought, to give people hope for the future. Such items *were* available through EA trade, but only at exorbitant prices. To make them available at or below cost (through the bridging aid) might help to tamp down inflation as well as to pick up spirits.

Many, of course, benefited from the Nf 70 million worth of food parcels arriving in Suriname each year from family members in The Netherlands. But as Minister Mungra pointed out, 90 percent of the local economy was considered "black," so it was going to take more than a few thousand wheels of Gouda and cans of sardines to rein in inflation. Despite the continuing disputes over conditionalities, the slide of the Surinamese guilder on the black market was temporarily reversed on news of the aid accord and of an \$11.4 million grant from the Common Market for several agricultural projects and to improve the coastal highway between Coronie and Nieuw Nickerie.

Among the issues complicating relations between Suriname and The Netherlands was the fate of political refugees. Tens of thousands of Surinamers had fled their country to the shelter of The Netherlands in the 1980s. With the return of democracy in 1987, the question arose whether sanctuary was still necessary. Who could be at risk if the rule of law was fully restored? The Dutch Minister of Justice determined that there was *no* risk and ordered expulsion of all those who had entered the country without proper visas. His action was quickly blocked, however, by a Dutch judge who questioned whether Bouterse and his men might still be in a position to exact revenge on avowed enemies when they returned.

Eddy Sedoc, Suriname's Minister of Foreign Affairs, joined the issue with a novel twist in support of the courts—and the asylum seekers. "Don't send them to us," he warned. "We will be in no position to absorb them economically until our development is in full swing again!" Worries about safety were heightened in November 1988, when to the horror of the Dutch and Surinamers alike, a Hindustani male, returning to Suriname from Holland,

hanged himself in a military jail cell after being taken into custody on his arrival when his papers were allegedly found not to be in order. The two issues seemed related: if return migration was not yet safe, could Dutch aid be rendered properly?

TRYING TO END THE WAR

A lot was riding, then, upon efforts to end the Bush Negro uprising. And this is where the greatest division lay between the civilian authorities and the men in the barracks. There was no substitute for victory, Bouterse claimed, since the enemy consisted of terrorists, mercenaries, and traitors to the homeland. "You don't negotiate with terrorists," military spokesmen repeated again and again. Other than expressing their desire for an end to the conflict, Front leaders took no public position on negotiations, standing aside as the CCK launched exploratory talks with the Jungle Commando (JC) in French Guiana and later at JC headquarters in Langatabiki on the upper Marowijne. In The Netherlands, Chin A Sen's *Bevrijdingsraad* attacked the Arron government for its aloof attitude. But, until a deal could be struck that the government would support, it was just as well that the CCK, not the government, did the exploring *and* served as the lightning rod for Bouterse's wrath.

After the second Pokigron incident, the JC announced it was terminating its unilateral cease-fire. Then, when it became clear that neither the army nor the government was inclined to rush into negotiations, it launched an offensive in the Patamaka area (site of an extensive palm oil plantation), south of Moengo. With the JC dominant in small skirmishes, Bouterse determined to launch a full offensive to drive the guerrillas away from Patamaka. Heavy fighting was reported between June and August, but the JC was able to avoid any direct confrontation, hitting new targets in the Brokopondo area. Willebrord Nieuwenhuis reported in September 1988 that the Bush Negro determination to keep the struggle going was a function of their fear that the spirits of the dead (the victims in this civil war) would force them back into slavery if they were not properly avenged.⁵ By now, Surinamers were beginning to reconcile themselves to a stalemate. Would this cost Suriname its development aid—indeed, its very development?

The civilian authorities appeared to be transfixed. If their game plan was to keep the National Army at bay so that they could take decisive actions, where were the decisive actions? Badrissein Sital complained bitterly that "every day Arron breaks the constitution" (by refusing to set the machinery in motion to create the *Staatsraad* and the local governing councils). Indeed, the government chipped away at the military's influence—removing military appointees from the ministries, cutting back the financial powers of the

military, and boycotting military celebrations of the February coup. Lachmon nevertheless spoke on several occasions in defense of the military, offering his congratulations for their cooperation in the redemocratization process.

By November, the Front finally yielded on the issue of the *Staatsraad* and presented a bill to constitute that body. Major legislation (e.g., the long-awaited development program), like the constitutional amendments, required the State Council's advisory opinion, and the Front's tactic of holding up its creation risked jeopardizing the government's image as constitutionally law-abiding. The constitution, however, said nothing about the Council's composition, apart from guaranteeing its initial (1987) seats to the army, employers, and unions (the members of Bouterse's *Topberaad*). Downplaying this functional representation in favor of political parties, the Front passed enabling legislation that gave only one seat to the military, one to the employers, and two to the unions. Ten seats were reserved for representatives of the National Assembly, awarded proportionally. This meant seven seats for the Front, and one each for NDP, PALU, and PL. Even if all the other members of the *Staatsraad* were to vote against the Front, the outcome would be a 7-7 tie, with the President holding the tie-breaking vote. Derby and Bouterse were furious.

Because of the strains of insurgency and the spillover effects of distrust and discrimination that fell to Bush Negroes in the south-central part of the country, Brunswijk's appeal began to fail there. A human rights organization, Mooiwana 86, organized by Bush Negro activist Stanley Rensch, claimed that 25,000 Bush Negroes (mostly Saramakaners) were being starved. Unable to make it through the jungles to safety in French Guiana, Saramakaners and Matawais began to gravitate to a more neutral or even (in the case of the Matawais) pro-Bouterse position. In Pokigron, for example, where National Army troops had killed a group of Saramakaners on New Year's Day, 1988, mistaking them for guerrillas, the Army and Government had done their best to make amends. By the start of 1989, the residents of Pokigron were so solidly in the anti-Brunswijk camp that the Jungle Commando raided it in April and burned fifty houses. Located just above the Afobaka Dam, Pokigron was seen by both sides as a strategic point. The dam itself was the real prize, of course. In June, a Jungle Commando unit led by a Bush Negro called Barabas seized the dam and opened one of its floodgates. They told a group of Suralco workers, whose bus they had captured earlier in the day, that they were angry at the delays in the peace talks.

Lachmon and his colleagues were caught in a dangerous swirl of multiple conflicts. Despite the considerable leverage that Dutch aid represented, it was not easily utilized by the Front. The government reminded one of a long dugout canoe one sees on the Surinamese rivers. But in this one the crew was poling their cargo upstream through the most treacherous rapids at high tide. It was looking rather doubtful that they would reach their destination.

KOUROU AND THE TUCAYANAS

President Shankar called for a general amnesty for civil war-related violence in his 1989 New Year's address. The National Assembly passed such a law in April but excluded cases involving human rights violations (summary executions, torture, etc.). This exclusion provoked an angry response by Bouterse (whose men had the most to lose under such a law). "This is going to cause turbulence in my ranks that I won't be able to control," he warned. As if to demonstrate his "slipping control," military police broke into a jail in Tammenga in April to free one of two *volksmilitia* members arrested in connection with the Mooi Wana killings in 1986. Even greater "turbulence" was promised if there were a cease-fire with the rebels. But now the initiative in negotiations passed from the CCK to the Front itself.

Members of the Front reportedly had their first talks with representatives of the Jungle Commando at Schiphol Airport (in The Netherlands) in November 1988. These talks were resumed in French Guiana late in February 1989, with some help by the CCK. Hans Buddingh' writes that all efforts came to naught until Lachmon took the lead—and the risks. On June 8, at Portal, an island in the Marowijne River, an accord was signed by Lachmon and Brunswijk calling for an immediate cease-fire, termination of the state of emergency in eastern and southern Suriname (which gave the National Army special powers), provision of appropriate representation for these areas in the government, and extension of aid for resettlement of refugees and reconstruction and development in the affected areas.

Subsequent negotiations over the Jungle Commando's future snagged on Brunswijk's demand that the JC become a unit of the national police, with jurisdiction over the interior. Bouterse was adamantly opposed, urging that Brunswijk's men turn in their arms and go into exile in The Netherlands instead. His representative on the *Staatsraad*, Chas Mijns, echoed the point; and President Shankar, obviously feeling the military's pressure, urged that the provision be dropped. Nevertheless, it was included in an accord signed in Kourou, French Guiana, on July 21, 1989, by Brunswijk and a Surinamese government delegation headed by Lachmon and Education Minister Ronald Venetiaan. What about Shankar's opposition, Venetiaan was asked. "It's irrelevant," he answered. "This agreement is a covered check." In other words, with an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly sufficient even to remove the President, the accord was "in the bank."

But Shankar was not the problem. Frank Playfair, floor leader of the NDP, argued that Kourou violated the constitution, effectively breaking the unitary character of the state. This was a "declaration of war on the Surinamese people," he argued. Debate continued for several weeks, until the National Assembly finally voted 44-2, with five abstentions, to accept the

peace treaty. Now the problem was getting Bouterse to honor it. One source of pressure came from across the border in French Guiana, through a visit by a high French military official. His advice to "accept Kourou" was about as weighty as Bouterse would hear. Yet Bouterse's defiance was fierce. Arron and Shankar tried to lure the *Bevel* into cooperation by promising further talks and guarantees. Brunswijk warned against compromise and threatened to attack Paramaribo if the army attempted a coup. Provoking Bouterse just a little further, the legislature lifted the state of emergency (imposed at the height of the guerrilla insurgency in December 1986).

The jungle peace did not last long. Within hours of the Assembly's action to lift the state of emergency, a group identified as Amerindians hijacked a ferryboat and an airplane in western Suriname.⁶ They called themselves the *Tucayana Amazone Indianen* (Tucayana Amazon Indians), and their manifesto, quickly delivered to the media, explained their action as a protest against the Kourou Accord. If Jungle Commando "police" were going to be stationed throughout the interior, this would take away the Amerindians' autonomy. The manifesto demanded abrogation of the accord and its thorough renegotiation to take these concerns into account. As journalists and politicians turned their attention to these other jungle inhabitants, still other grievances came out. The Amerindians were always being taken for granted, they said, whether it was on the coast (where their hunting and fishing grounds in Galibi were encroached upon) or the interior. Development of western Suriname had ignored the fate of Amerindians living nearby (in Apura and other villages), and they resented being confined *de facto* to reservations that disrupted their traditional life-style and gave them little in return.⁷

Just who were these Indians? The word "Tucayana" is not mentioned as an ethnic category in the literature. The *Encyclopedie van Suriname* uses the term to describe a particular kind of priest or seer.⁸ In all probability, the term was chosen as an integrative device to reduce the fragmentation among Carib, Arawak, and other tribal groups. More relevant, perhaps, is the background of the Tucayana leadership. According to Henck Arron, they included former members of the *volksmilitia* and Delta Force, a crack unit of uniformed soldiers whose special assignment had been jungle warfare against the rebels.⁹ No wonder that, as civilians, they might be worried about Jungle Commando police in their territory! Bouterse's subsequent protestations of innocence regarding his having set up this new insurgency might technically have been correct. But where did the Tucayanas' impressive arsenal of weapons come from? Even before the uprising, human rights activist Stanley Rensch had warned that the military was arming the Amerindians.¹⁰

The Amerindians' capacity for mischief seemed considerable. A few days after the first hijackings, they commandeered a 500-ton ship in the Nickerie River. And if the Jungle Commando had closed the eastern interior of Suriname to economic activity, the Tucayanas closed it in the west.

Hindustani lumbering companies had their equipment confiscated or were told to pay exorbitant fees to carry out their activities. Truckers and other motorists venturing along the road to the site of the (largely dormant) West Suriname Project had their vehicles (and cargoes) taken. Another ferry was captured late in October on the Coppename River. Then, at the mouth of the Marowijne River in eastern Suriname, Tucayanas attacked a group of fishing boats, striking at another economic enterprise over which they demanded some say.

Among the Tucayanas' demands were talks with Lachmon and Bouterse. Lachmon saw no difficulty in this and asked them to identify their leader. "If the Indians can prove to me that their interests have been damaged by the Kourou Accord," Lachmon said, "I am ready to correct any possible shortcomings and to make a separate agreement with them."¹¹ But the Tucayanas had second thoughts and postponed the talks. Brunswijk, in the meantime, vowed to serve the interests of both Amerindians and Bush Negroes under terms of the Kourou Accord. "We've both been held back," he said.

At a press conference in the Indian village of Bigi Poika, near the Zanderij airfield, the Tucayanas' leader, Commander "Ebe" Thomas Sabajo reiterated the group's demands. His demand that the Jungle Commando members be punished as "terrorists" was greeted with some irony by Bush Negroes who recognized Thomas as one of the soldiers taking part in the Mooi Wana massacre in December 1986. Nevertheless, closure of the western frontier had to be taken seriously, whoever was behind it. In October 1989, Lachmon offered to meet with Thomas. At their meeting, the Amerindian leader demanded a development policy for the interior, disarmament of the Jungle Commando, and replacement of the present government by "a national government," presumably one that included Amerindians and the military. Lachmon was not persuaded. The only concession he was willing to offer was a national referendum on the Kourou Accord. Thomas rejected that proposal as "a conscious attempt to set the majority against an oppressed minority."¹²

As Willy Soemita later put it, rebel groups now began to spring out of the ground like mushrooms. A group calling itself the *Unie Voor Nationale Bevrijding en Democratie* (Union for National Liberation and Democracy) moved in to take over Moengo in October 1989. Allegedly a breakaway group from the Jungle Commando, the *Unie* explained that it had taken this action to defend Moengo against the Tucayanas, the National Army, and the Jungle Commando. Apparently with the help of an airlift from the National Army to their base outside of Albina, the Tucayanas were able to launch an attack on Moengo late in October, but the *Unie* managed to repulse it. Control over Moengo would alternate between the *Unie* and the Front government for the next six months. In the process, bauxite mining often ground to a halt. If the various guerrilla groups were out to control Suriname's resources and hold economic development hostage, they certainly were succeeding.

Brunswijk now declared that he had "no trust any more in a national accord" (Kourou). A survey of the 6,600 Bush Negro refugees in French Guiana indicated that only 37 percent were willing to return to their homes.¹³ Seeing the prospect for more war, Bouterse called for direct talks, calculating that perhaps he could come to some sort of understanding with Brunswijk. It was an amazing demonstration of the paralysis of the civilian government that Bouterse, by default, could take the lead in negotiations. To everyone's surprise, he found Brunswijk willing to deal. In a scene worthy of a Hollywood film, the two "commanders" rendezvoused in November, at the confluence of the Cottica and Commewijne rivers near Moengo. Pictures of them talking amicably on Bouterse's speedboat were viewed with amazement in Paramaribo. Could they actually bury the hatchet so easily? Whatever the answer, yet another national anniversary (the fourteenth anniversary of independence) had been accompanied by a symbolic *verzoening*. Bouterse's knack for showmanship could not be denied.

Brunswijk may have paid dearly for this gesture. The *Unie*, to show its opposition to any reconciliation with the military, led a series of raids in the Afobaka Dam area—against health workers in the village of Brokopondo, a busload of Suralco workers near Victoria, and the military post at Kraka, all to the south of the Zanderij airport. In the latter incident, seven soldiers were killed and six seriously wounded. Because reports indicated that white mercenaries were involved, President Shankar gave the National Army authority to counterattack. Demonstrating that he still could command obedience, Ronnie Brunswijk called the Brokopondo unit back to Moengo and reprimanded them for exceeding their instructions.¹⁴ Two of his lieutenants, Barabas and Papato, were placed under arrest for having their own private meeting with Bouterse without the JC's authorization.

Doubts as to the government's willingness to stand by the Kourou Accord—as well, of course, as the continued state (or states) of war—had led Brunswijk to seek new shipments of weapons from abroad. Trying to juggle these new antagonists into a new, more complicated equilibrium, Lachmon traveled to Moengo for talks with both the *Unie* and the JC. He tried to assure them that a satisfactory compromise could be found to keep Kourou basically intact. But they insisted that the military be prosecuted for their killings and alleged drug-dealing. Lachmon was noncommittal, but agreed to try again to bring all parties together for roundtable discussions. With this, the *Unie* gave up its occupation of Moengo and lifted its blockade of the roads there.¹⁵

CAN THE CENTER HOLD?

Life in Paramaribo was, surprisingly, unaffected by these events. Apart from those families (mostly Creole) whose sons had been called up for military

duty, and those occasional moments where military action near the dam produced a power blackout, the guerrilla war could have been on another continent. This clearly was not the situation for those living in the frontier areas of Albina (almost totally destroyed), Moengo (periodically blockaded), the Patamaka and Victoria plantations (seized and looted), and now the southwest region (sealed off by the Tucayanas). But this left over three-quarters of the population "in the rear," so to speak. What was happening there?

For one thing, morale was dropping fast. RAVAKSUR, the umbrella organization of union confederations, declared a daylong general strike in May 1989 to show dissatisfaction with the government's inability (1) to work things out with the Dutch, (2) to control the black market, and (3) to rein in the army. When the Kourou Accord was announced, the unions fell out among themselves, Derby initially opposing it, the others quickly overriding him. Derby continued to press for a "national dialogue"—not just with the combatants in the interior but with all interested political groups. Such a dialogue might have taken place in the *Staatsraad*, but as the *NRC-Handelsblad* pointed out in August 1989, the unions, miffed at the single seat allotted them, still had not appointed their representative. In Derby's view, it was an illegitimate body.

On his own initiative, President Shankar accepted the unions' proposal of a national dialogue, inviting representatives of the political parties and functional groups to the Presidential Palace for talks. Derby used the occasion to restate his opposition to the Kourou Accord. He also insisted on a new national government—one that included the military and the unions. But, apart from the reiteration of positions already well established, nothing of substance—certainly no new agreements—came forth.

Economic conditions continued to deteriorate. One of the latest, and most shocking, measurements of this was the crash of one of Suriname Airways' two DC8 passenger planes. The jet crashed near the Zanderij airport in a heavy fog, on June 7, 1989; 176 of those on board, including an all-star soccer team, lost their lives. Later reports indicated that more lives might have been saved had equipment been summoned more rapidly to the scene, and the rescuers not been more interested in looting the site.¹⁶ Financial scandals had plagued Suriname Airways' operations over the years, and its current director, Atta Mungra, had been fighting to save his job for almost a year against similar charges. The crash investigation revealed dangerous cost-cutting methods. The control tower's guidance system was not working, and members of the crew, including the pilot, were beyond retirement age and working at below scale. For these and other reasons, Mungra finally resigned in October 1989. Andre Haakmat compared the lost DC8 with the Shankar Government: both had lost their bearings with disastrous consequences.¹⁷

Indications of another sort of scandal grew in the late 1980s, as more and

more drug shipments to The Netherlands revealed Suriname as the transshipment point in the Americas. In February 1989, Dutch authorities reported having intercepted ten cocaine deliveries from Suriname in the preceding three months. Some (token?) drug enforcement took place in Suriname itself, as cargoes from Colombia, Bolivia, and Brazil were seized. In April, the head of the drug enforcement office in Paramaribo from 1979 to 1987 was arrested. Someone locally was not pleased. As a number of Colombian, Bolivian, and Surinamese were brought to trial for drug-dealing, the presiding judge's house was bombed. The incident did not prevent harsh sentences for all the defendants.

How deeply was the military involved in all this? Their control over the many airstrips in the south and southwest, together with the customs offices at the international airport at Zanderij and in the country's harbors, gave them an excellent chance to offer transit services to drug producers. But, aside from the Boerenveen case, Dutch and American authorities found little that was judicable and could point only to "port of origin" indications. However, in December 1989, after the murder of four Brazilian drug dealers and seizure of a 10,000-kilogram shipment of cocaine in The Netherlands, police authorities organized an intensive search for Roy Tolud, one of Bouterse's sixteen commandos, who was believed to be involved.

About one-third of the narcotics arriving in Holland was thought to originate in Suriname.¹⁸ Yet Dutch-Surinamese cooperation in criminal investigations had been suspended after the killings in 1982. Restoration of collaboration should have followed the return to democratic government; yet the Dutch suspected that shared information would be abused, especially by the military police, empowered as they were with general *opsporings-bevoegdheid* (investigative powers) by virtue of a government decree issued in February 1985.

Dutch aid, in general, remained on hold through 1989, thanks to the Arron/Shankar government's unwillingness or inability to meet its various conditions. The consequences were difficult for many, despite the EA and other schemes. As Leo Morpurgo pointed out, Suriname needed roughly \$20 million a month for the importation of essential goods.¹⁹ Exports brought in only around \$9 million. Financing the EA trade, which the Central Bank estimated at almost \$40 million in 1988, required a steady siphoning off of foreign currency by the country's exporters in defiance of Suriname's currency controls. Still another EA source was the laundered profits from the drug trade.

Late in 1989, a wave of criminal behavior broke out, with drive-by shootings at police stations, armed robberies along the Zanderij road, and destruction of a courthouse by arson. These events provoked a roundup of suspects (mostly Amerindian) by the police, and in apparent retaliation, a policeman was assassinated in Paranam in December. Arson destroyed three

old colonial residences located behind an aggressive anti-Bouterse news agency when fire grenades launched at the agency went astray. Automatic rifle fire directed at his residence prompted Stanley Rensch, the Bush Negro human rights activist, to flee the country. Over the New Year's holidays, a grenade was hurled at the home of Finance Minister Subhas Mungra (without causing any damage). Then, at the end of January 1990, the top floor of the *Staatsraad* building (where important judicial records were stored) was destroyed by a fire grenade attack, as was the Ministry of Economic Affairs a few months later.

MONKEY IN THE CATBIRD SEAT

In December 1989, a group of Amerindians from Bernharddorp who had worked on the West Suriname Project or derived their living from traffic along the Apura road got into a fight with the Amerindians involved in the Tucayana movement, presumably to get their fair share of the revenues involved in the traffic (of drugs?) through their area. The Tucayanas, backed by the National Army, killed or captured most of them. Those who were captured were taken to Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo for questioning. Four of the leaders were later flown to Apura, presumably to gather evidence, where allegedly they were executed. Whatever the truth of this story, a group of Amerindian women commenced a sit-in demonstration on February 3, 1990, under the *Mamabon* (Mother Tree) across the street from the National Assembly, demanding release of the prisoners and/or information about them. They maintained their demonstration/encampment for over four months. Because everyone in power turned a deaf ear to the protesters, their highly visible plight brought shame and discredit to *both* the Shankar government and the military.

It was interesting to hear Surinamers talking about the way President Harry Truman had fired General Douglas MacArthur for insubordination during the Korean War in 1951. Certainly Bouterse's insubordination was more confident and blatant now than it had been in the first years of democratic rule. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the coup, he pulled out more stops than one would have thought imaginable. Before a crowd estimated at 10,000, he managed to lure *both* Brunswijk and Thomas onto the stage of his celebration. He vigorously condemned the United States for the "interference" of its energetic ambassador, Richard Howland, and told President Shankar, "Your ship is sinking." More ominously, he warned that if the government tried to devalue the Surinamese currency, the military would refuse to defend it against the predictable fury of the public.²⁰

The Shankar government took the Brunswijk/Thomas/Bouterse meeting as a sign that an overall accord might be possible, and it called for a new peace conference. But, curiously, the Tucayanas refused to participate. As

long as the *Mamabon* demonstration continued, they said, they did not feel safe in Paramaribo. Shankar decided to hold the conference without them. Television pictures showed the Presidential Palace ballroom packed with representatives of the various Amerindian and Bush Negro tribes, as well as of the Jungle Commando and the Front. It seemed highly unlikely that a group this size could produce a well-tailored accord. But whatever Shankar had in mind, the course of negotiations was derailed at the end of the second day with the arrest of Brunswijk and his men by Bouterse and the military police.

Brunswijk had arrived in Paramaribo with news that his men had seized a small plane loaded with 1,000 kilograms of cocaine. It had missed the landing strip in Apura, he said, and landed in Moengo by mistake—an error of some 500 kilometers. Four passengers, all Colombian, were arrested, and the cocaine was seized, as was the plane. The implication of this sensational story was that here, finally, was proof that Bouterse was permitting the Medellín cartel to use Surinamese airspace (and landing strips) for the transshipment of drugs to Europe and elsewhere. Yet the details of the story were odd: there was excellent visibility on the day of the alleged flight, and the flight error was too great. Also arousing suspicion was the follow-up news that the four Colombians managed to escape shortly after their arrest. (The only verification of any part of the story was the supervised destruction of the drugs in the presence of the ambassadorial corps in April.)

One day after Brunswijk made his dramatic announcement, he was invited to Bouterse's military headquarters for private talks. When he and his advisers—and bodyguards—arrived, Bouterse placed them under arrest. The two bodyguards resisted and were killed. Fortunately, a policeman at the scene was able to escape and notify President Shankar, who immediately demanded that Bouterse let the prisoners go. When Bouterse did not immediately comply, many began to fear that Brunswijk would meet the same fate that the Bernharddorp Amerindian leaders allegedly had met. A day later it was reported that Brunswijk had been freed.

Bouterse explained his action in terms of the drugs Brunswijk said he had. "We wanted to question him," he said, "to get to the bottom of it. And besides, we have the authority to take such action by virtue of the Military Police's investigative authority. Regardless of the Constitution's provision extending military decrees for one government term, a number of NPS legislators resolved to strip the 400-man military police force of this power. The ECHO news agency in Paramaribo quoted a reliable source in the Front that the VHP was strongly opposed to such an action, stirring rumors that the VHP might leave the Front to form an alliance with the military and the NDP. In any event, Bouterse warned that without the military police at their side, the civilian police would be helpless in the fight against crime. The Front ignored this veiled threat and rescinded the decree in a lively National Assembly

meeting in April.

As if in response, the Pandora's box of fanciful threats opened wider in May, when a group calling itself Angula Mandela attacked a Jungle Commando group near the Afobaka Dam. Angula Mandela claimed to speak for the Saramaka and Matawai groups who felt they were being made to pay an unnecessarily high price for the Jungle Commando's struggle. The leaders were former members of the JC. But unlike the *Unie*, they were clearly on Bouterse's side.

As the situation grew more complicated at the dam, Bouterse launched a campaign in the Moengo area in open defiance of his civilian superiors, Shankar and Arron. Curiously, Shankar flew off to Paraguay in the midst of the Moengo siege, to attend an OAS meeting in Asuncion. It was not all pomp and circumstance, however. Shankar appealed to the OAS to devise ways to assist countries like his that were struggling to develop and redemocratize at the same time. Nevertheless, his abandonment of his post at this time won little favor among Surinamese opinion makers; and his speech, appearing to some like a call for foreign intervention, though actually an amorphous invitation for discussion, produced confusion and dismay.

Rather than fight a pitched battle at Moengo, the JC decided to abandon the bauxite city. Before they left, however, they mined roads and blew up several harbor facilities and the Suralco offices. Bouterse's forces chased Brunswijk into the forest, skirmishing with him all along the road from Moengo to Patamaka and on to Langatabiki. Finally, in September 1990, the military reached Langatabiki, home of the Paramakaners and their pro-Brunswijk chief, *Granman* Forster. Here, it seems, things came to their rest. Brunswijk had been forced further upriver to Stoelman's Island, in Djuka country. There were no roads and a number of rapids between Langatabiki and Stoelman's Island, so the military had the means, logistically, to bottle up Brunswijk. The possibilities for resuming economic activity in the northern part of eastern Suriname were a little better.

ONCE AGAIN, THE DUTCH CONNECTION

At the start of the siege of Moengo, Ronnie Brunswijk surprised everyone by saying he had decided to call it quits. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested in French Guiana for carrying a false passport. Somehow he was permitted to fly to Paris, where he asked for a visa to go to The Netherlands. The Dutch government responded that it was not interested in talking with him. Still, he somehow managed to get to The Hague and have talks with a number of people. These, it seemed, led him to change his mind about abandoning the cause. While things were very bad in eastern Suriname, he said, morale was good among his troops. He returned to take command in mid-July 1990.

(This bizarre episode reminds one of the antics that often accompany contract renegotiations in professional sports or television.) New peace negotiations began a few weeks later in Cayenne, but no one was holding their breath.

With the removal of the military police's investigative authority, the way was open for Dutch-Surinamese police collaboration in drug and other criminal matters—something that had been suspended following the December killings of 1982. Connivance of the military police (still in control of the customs procedures in the harbor and at the airport) was felt to be important in this traffic, but so was the military's ability to rendezvous offshore with Brazilian and other oceangoing vessels.

Despite logic directing one's attention to the National Army as the principal source of drug-running in the country, logic also suggested a similar, though perhaps reduced, ability on the Jungle Commando's part. It still controlled several airstrips in the interior, and it still managed to keep reasonably well armed and manned to carry on the struggle. Such, at least, were the arguments of Badrissin Sital to the press in shunting aside questions about the army's involvement. But if drugs could come into Suriname to these airstrips, how could they leave for transatlantic destinations? What did the JC control that was the equivalent of an international airport and harbor? Easy, Sital answered. They had French Guiana.²¹ The French may have found this a preposterous answer, but Suriname's eastern neighbor is a lightly populated country with porous borders and a variety of connections to the outside world. Were the Dutch and French abetting the Jungle Commando by closing their eyes to drug-trafficking as the price to pay for a "greater good"?

What effect did any of this have on the Dutch aid situation? In May, Jan Pronk, Minister of Development Cooperation, declared his dissatisfaction with the absence of a long-term development plan. "Suriname is stricken with lethargy, spiritual impassivity, indifference, and inactivity," he said. Minister Pronk followed up his sharp criticisms with a dramatic visit to Suriname in July 1990. In meeting after meeting, he was attacked for his allegedly rigid and constantly expanding conditions for the full restoration of aid. Yet, on his return to The Netherlands, he told newsmen that—off the record—most Surinamese business and political leaders agreed with his assessment of the country's malaise—if not with his strict conditions for curing it.

ANOTHER BLOOD FEUD

Shortly after the Pronk visit, Paramaribo was electrified by the murder of a chief inspector of police outside the entrance to Bouterse's office in near Fort Zeelandia. Denying any military responsibility for this event, Bouterse was not believed by many. The events rapidly leading to the killing—and following it—had all the earmarks of a blood feud.

It started on Friday, August 3, when a military policeman and a police officer got into an argument in a bar. The latter excused himself to make a phone call, and when the military policeman later left the bar, he was immediately arrested by police waiting outside. Details of the dispute or charges placed against the soldier were not released.

Word quickly reached the military, it seems, for within a few hours, a military police van forced a police car off the road outside of town and the policemen were taken into custody. When word reached the military that the arrested military policeman had been wounded "accidentally" while being jailed, another military vehicle was seen outside the police headquarters in the Nieuwe Haven area, emptying round after round of automatic rifle fire into the building's windows and façade. The next day the place was a shambles.

In response to the arrests of his men and the attack on his headquarters, Inspector Herman Goodings went into the military headquarters late Saturday night for talks with Bouterse. An hour or so later, he left the building. Shots were heard shortly thereafter. Curiously, no one seems to have gone to investigate, and it was only sometime the next morning that Inspector Goodings's body was found lying by the monument to war veterans across from the *Bevel's* office.

The police reacted with a combination of outrage and fear. They declared a work stoppage and demonstrated at the National Assembly, demanding that the perpetrators be found and arrested. They barricaded the roads passing all police posts in the city and surrounding areas, to prevent drive-by shootings, such as had occurred in December 1989. Widespread popular support for the police, exhibited by huge crowds swelling their ranks in their continuing demonstrations, seemed to do little to hearten them. According to *NRC-Handelsblad*, many began to take "extended" (i.e., permanent) leaves to The Netherlands with their families. As the only armed group, presumably, upholding the principles of law and order, they seemed to be in a perennially losing struggle.

As this is written, over two years later, there has still been no resolution to the Goodings matter. Two purported witnesses have disappeared, forensic tests have not been reported, and further explanations for the initial arrest and subsequent violence have not been forthcoming.

THE MILITARY'S BACK!

After several months of quiet demoralization in which slumping political and economic indicators directed more and more Surinamers to the visa lines outside the Dutch and U.S. consulates, the country finally lurched into an interesting new coup and government. As President Shankar prepared for a trip to consult with the Dutch Parliament and government, Commander

Bouterse decided to go along. There was a slight hitch: Bouterse was *persona non grata* in The Netherlands and was denied a visa. Still, he decided to go, planning to change planes in Amsterdam to visit his friend in arms, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, the charismatic leader of Ghana.

Bouterse's arrival at Schiphol Airport in The Netherlands caused a minor scandal, as he was kept away from newsmen and forced to wait for his connection in seclusion. On his return from Ghana, he was again denied a visa and barred from meeting the press. This time, he chose to fly to Zurich for a few days. On his third trip through Schiphol, the routine was repeated. He returned to Paramaribo on December 21, telling the press that he had been mortified. Shankar, he said, had done nothing to protest his treatment. In fact, Shankar himself had been humiliated, photographed by the *NRC-Handelsblad* huddled in the rain, waiting for admission to Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers' office. "What kind of government is this?" Bouterse asked. The next day he tendered his resignation as Commander, turning the reins of the military over to his second in command, Iwan Graanoogst.

The incident stunned Paramaribo, and Shankar summoned his entire Cabinet for an emergency meeting to decide what to do. While most of Suriname's Christians were attending services on Christmas Eve, Graanoogst telephoned the Presidential Palace and curtly told the President that he and his minister could go home. This was a coup. The military was taking over. Shankar and the others did as they were told, and the redemocratization of Suriname came, at least temporarily, to a shuddering halt.

Later, Graanoogst told the country that this would only be an interim government, one that would remain completely in the hands of civilians, and that there would be elections within 100 days. The announcement had a differential effect within and outside of the country. Within the country, there was, as in 1980, a feeling that something good might come of this. Things could not get much worse than they had been under Arron and Shankar. The military was, and would remain, a headache for the country, but parting company with the present government was not cause for much lament.

The outside world was quick to judge otherwise. The Netherlands abruptly cut what aid it was providing, as did the United States and Venezuela. An OAS meeting called just before the New Year roundly condemned the events in Suriname, no doubt thinking of the precedent that should be set regarding backsliding elsewhere in Latin America. CARICOM leaders voted to withdraw Suriname's observer status at its meetings, and EEC ministers began to reconsider the development projects they had approved for the country.

From behind the scenes, Bouterse picked seventy-seven-year-old Johan S. P. Kraag, former Minister of Social Affairs and honorary chairman of the NPS, to be the new President. Kraag was a respected elder statesman with a wide following in the Moravian Church. Bouterse, it seems, had come to

share the earlier view of Lachmon and Arron that the presidency could be kept weak, for the more critical post of Vice President—and first minister of the Cabinet—went to Jules Wijdenbosch, leader of the NDP and Prime Minister of the last Bouterse government before the 1987 elections. Wijdenbosch had penned a lengthy critique of the Shankar/Arron government in May 1990, listing twenty-five domestic policy crises that the Front had failed to handle. One hundred days was clearly insufficient time to make much headway through such a list, but if there were to be any improvement in the NDP's standing at the polls, Wijdenbosch had provided his own measuring stick.

THE GOLDEN MONKEY WRENCH

With the OAS, Dutch, and other groups lining up as observers, the election campaign was likely to be as open and fair as in 1987. But it would be a difficult one. Front members would have to demonstrate that their failure to achieve more was largely the result of the constant interference of the military, and the military would have to disprove that claim, as well as establish credentials (not yet very convincing) that the NDP and military together could do a better job. It looked like a straight fight. News that Reuben Lie Pauw Sam was reviving the *Volkspartij* did not seem to excite the public very much, and the PALU—also gearing up—was not given much of a chance. Union leader Fred Derby, once so critical of the Front government, made a preelection alliance between his Surinamese Labor Party (SPA) and the Front (now called the New Front). This may have had the effect of assuring voters that Derby's policy ideas would be given a better hearing. It may also have suggested that Derby was simply selling out. Whatever the case, organized labor was now in the New Front's camp...at least on paper.

But a campaign focusing upon policy issues, governmental performance, and military interference was never permitted to develop. Early in February, as the parties were discussing coalitions, platforms, and candidates, the Dutch tossed a very strange monkey wrench into the works. A report was leaked from a Dutch Cabinet meeting suggesting that Foreign Minister Van den Broek and Development Aid Minister Pronk, together with Prime Minister Lubbers and Justice Minister Hirsch Ballin, had proposed creation of a new Dutch Commonwealth (*Gemenebest*) for the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname.

What would this mean? The recolonization of Suriname by Holland? The end of sovereignty? Was this some Machiavellian way of trying to rid Suriname of its military problem? Further reports from The Netherlands were vague as to what concrete steps were being considered, and the "leakers" were quick to make it known that other members of the Dutch Cabinet were opposed to the plan. Nevertheless, Van den Broek had already discussed the idea with the United States, the Organization of American States, Venezuela,

France, and Brazil, so it was not just "something that came up in a meeting."²²

Hinting about such a political change on the eve of an election had both confusing and electrifying consequences. Instead of closely evaluating the policies and performance of incumbents and their rivals, voters were now given a more subjective range of dreams and fears to choose among. One can hardly imagine a more effective means of disrupting the self-determination of a country. But then, Suriname had not enjoyed normal self-determination, and would never do so as long as civilian authority was undermined by the armed forces.

Although details were never forthcoming, proponents of the *Gemenebest* saw it as giving Suriname and The Netherlands a common (and therefore stable) currency, freedom of movement back and forth between the two lands, an overarching justice system that would protect Suriname's human rights, and a more extensive and professional foreign service and military. These shared (or coordinated) activities would give the Dutch a greater voice in Surinamese affairs. In particular, in the military area, it might even give Suriname's civilian authorities the basis on which Bouterse and his army could be removed or stripped of their powers. This, according to Andre Haakmat, was the whole idea. By focusing the election exclusively on the military, it became a kind of public referendum on them. Perhaps more dramatically, the Dutch may have wanted to provoke the military into disrupting the elections or canceling them after the fact—whereupon the Dutch (together with the Americans) would have an excuse to invade.²³

As if to confirm Haakmat's suspicions, a U.S. State Department spokesperson in Washington declared shortly after the elections, "This hemisphere will not tolerate a new military dictatorship." The statement was directed to Suriname's military and was accompanied by a more pointed warning by Luigi Einaudi, the U.S. Ambassador to the OAS: "If legal procedures are followed and respect is shown for constitutional norms and laws—not only in political but also in criminal matters, such as drugs—then the question of the use of force [by the OAS] may not come up."²⁴

Both the NDP and New Front seemed to be caught offguard by the *Gemenebest* trial balloon, and for most of the campaign, they tried to edge around the issue as carefully as they could, indicating only that they would examine any proposal the Dutch might make. To their undoubted frustration, the only significant new party in the race embraced the idea enthusiastically. This was the *Democratisch Alternatief '91* (DA '91), led by Dr. Winston Jessurun. At the core of DA '91 was a group calling itself the *Alternatief Forum*, a multiethnic group of young professionals disillusioned by the failures of the Front.

They were joined by three older, established parties: the (mostly Hindustani) HPP, (predominantly Indonesian) *Pendawalima*, and (mostly Bush

Negro) *Broederschap en Eenheid in de Politiek* (Brotherhood and Unity in Politics). With its multiethnic character, DA '91 sought to reassure voters of its capacity to rule in an evenhanded (i.e., consociational) manner. But were the Forum's young people *experienced* enough to rule? None had been particularly active in politics or government before. As often was the case with new parties, fairly large crowds attended their rallies—partly to check them out, partly to express their alienation from both the New Front and NDP/military forces.

As the campaign wore on, the NDP pulled out all the stops. It certainly helped to have Jules Wijdenbosch as Vice President, presiding over the government ministries, for the NDP was "promising the moon—higher pensions and student grants, unemployment benefits, income-tax cuts, a halving of retail prices and a bargain with Holland...to do away with visa requirements for would-be migrants."²⁵ Hans Buddingh' wrote that some Surinamers saw Wijdenbosch as a new "Jopie" Pengel, the NPS leader of the 1950s and 1960s. He certainly tried to deliver, virtually emptying the government coffers to prove his party's commitment to the people.²⁶ As Henck Arron later pointed out, the Kraag/Wijdenbosch government spent Sf 820 million in the first half of 1991, causing a deficit of 360 million, while in the whole of 1990 the deficit was only Sf 206 million.²⁷ Fred Derby raged at such news: Wijdenbosch, he declared, was "the most dangerous and irresponsible politician the country has ever seen."²⁸ A *Rekenkamer* report in October 1991 confirmed Arron's and Derby's charges of chaos and irresponsibility in the Kraag/Wijdenbosch government.

The NDP must have been reasonably pleased with their investment. The election outcome was a major embarrassment for the New Front, which saw its share of the popular vote fall from 85 to 55 percent, enough to take only thirty of the National Assembly's fifty-one seats. Their losses, however, were split almost equally between the NDP, which won twelve seats (up dramatically from three in 1987), and the DA '91, with nine seats (see Table 8.1). The New Front's efforts in forming a government and running it were a little more complicated now than in 1987. Besides having the same old challenges (military insubordination, economic chaos, guerrilla war), they now had to find room in the government (and its program) for Derby's SPA *and*, possibly, the DA '91. If the NDP's political artillery had been quadrupled in size, it would certainly help to have the DA '91 on the New Front's side, even if not in the Cabinet.

CONCLUSION

While it is still too soon to analyze the events of 1991, there is more than enough to puzzle over in the years 1987 to 1990. It is still something of a

TABLE 8.1
ELECTION RESULTS, 1991: SEATS BY DISTRICT AND PARTY

Districts	New Front	NDP	DA '91
Paramaribo	10	4	3
Wanica	5	1	1
Nickerie	3	1	1
Coronie	1	1	0
Saramacca	2	1	0
Commewijne	2	1	1
Marowijne	2	1	0
Para	2	1	0
Brokopondo	1	0	2
Sipaliwini	2	1	1
TOTAL	30 a	12	9 b

a. NPS, 12; VHP, 9; KTPI, 7; SPA, 2.

b. HPP, 3; PL, 2; BEP, 3; AF, 1.

Source: *De West*, May 27 and June 3, 1991.

mystery as to why the Front government was so paralyzed and ineffective in its first three years in power. The military was clearly an intimidating force before which Lachmon's metaphorical advice of "bending like paddy in the wind" was taken all too literally by those in power. If the *oude rotten* may have tried any number of Machiavellian tricks to discredit and trim the military's sails, the "*jonge rot*" was clearly more than their match.

It was especially baffling, and discouraging, to see civilians so helpless before the military. Had they no sense of their popular authority? Was there no strategy developed in the years of their "exile" to box in the military and/or dismantle it? Arti Jessurun, one of several popular rivals to Arron for leadership within the NPS, compared the civil-military conflict with the story

of Dracula. In an interview with Hans Buddingh', he summarized a climactic moment in that story as follows:

At one point, where the monster comes threateningly toward a little boy, the little boy holds the cross firmly in his hand and Dracula crumples before him. A professional hunter also holds a cross in his hand, but Dracula takes it away from him because the hunter doesn't really believe in its power. The government [of Suriname] looks at itself as just a small group consisting of the President and thirteen ministers....They are still thinking along the lines of the consensus model [i.e., the consociational approach undertaken in the 1960s and violated at great cost in the 1970s]. But you cannot always solve problems by talking. They don't sufficiently realize that we are dealing here with a nasty opponent who has completely different standards.²⁹

Applied to Suriname's internal problems, one might think that the Shankar/Arron government, as Jessurun argued, was negotiating with the military from fear. But it might also be that the Front was following Arron's advice (see Chapter 7) "to summon the patience to wait for the right moment to do things." And *that* moment might have to wait until the (New) Front's second term of office.

NOTES

1. Shankar had been a Cabinet minister in the caretaker government of 1969 and for two years in the Jules Sedney government (1969-73). Thereafter, he had been director of the *Stichting Machinale Landbouw* in Wageningen, and a director of the Agricultural Development Bank.

2. In an interview with Hans Buddingh' in 1989, Lachmon said, "I find the President not the most powerful man in the country. He cannot be as useful as a parliamentary speaker. The latter can more easily cope with dangers and fine-tune behavior." *NRC-Handelsblad*, July 31, 1989.

3. *Ibid.*, May 13, 1988.

4. *Ibid.*, May 14, 1988.

5. *Ibid.*, Sept. 6, 1988.

6. The ferryboat was not only hijacked but hidden from aerial surveillance in the thick rain forest along the Coppename River. Although most passengers were freed, one was killed in the takeover. The pilot of the plane (taken at Washabo, on the Corantijn River) was held captive, and another plane was sent to Paramaribo with a manifesto explaining the action.

7. Interview, Nardo Aluman and Edward Swedo, July 18, 1990.

8. C. F. A. Bruining and J. Voorhoeve, eds., *Encyclopedie van Suriname* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1977), 478, 609.

9. *NRC-Handelsblad*, Sept. 5, 1989. This impression was echoed by the *Staatsraad* which concluded that they were "organized by obviously well-trained groups of people. *Ibid.*, Sept. 4, 1989.

10. *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1989.

11. *Ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1989.

12. *Ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1989.

13. *Ibid.*, Oct. 11, 1989.

14. A British mercenary, in fact, was shot and killed during the Moengo meeting.

15. Some counterallegations were made by the National Army regarding Jungle Commando involvement in drug-smuggling (*NRC-Handelsblad*, Apr. 14, 1989). It is possible that both sides had found this nefarious activity their only means of keeping a full war chest.

16. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1989.

17. *Ibid.*, June 19, 1989.

18. *Ibid.*, Mar. 28, 1990. By November 1991, that figure had risen to 60 percent. *Washington Post*, Nov. 4, 1991.

19. *NRC-Handelsblad*, June 7, 1989.

20. Bouterse also took the opportunity to remarry on this date, in a ceremony that was televised around the country and cost a small fortune. Wags noted that the new wife had the same name as the old (Ingrid), and his wedding date was also "easy to remember."

21. Rudi Kagie, "Mofo Koranti: De junglecoke in Saint-Laurent is plotseling wel erg goedkoop," *Vrij Nederland*, May 19, 1990.

22. Approval, it seemed, had been given to the plan by all but Brazil.

23. The *NRC-Handelsblad* scoffed at such a suggestion (May 27, 1991), but public debate in The Netherlands over a possible invasion of Suriname became very heated. *Ibid.*, May 28 and 31, June 3-7, 1991.

24. Ibid., May 30 and 31, 1991.

25. *The Economist*, June 8, 1991, 48.

26. *NRC-Handelsblad*, May 27, 1991.

27. *NRC-Handelsblad*, September 7, 1991.

28. Ibid.

29. Quoted in Hans Buddingh', "De zelfvernietiging van Suriname," *NRC-Handelsblad*, Zaterdag Bijvoegsel, July 28, 1990.

9

Civilian Authority Resurgent

Now, there are enough men in the army who want a disciplined body and who want to carry out what the civilian authorities indicate. There are enough. Thus you can't label the military as an enemy of the people. There may be military of that type, but know that there are...civilians of that type too.

Ronald Venetiaan, Interview

When it was clear that the New Front had fallen short of the two-thirds majority in the National Assembly needed for election of the President and amendment of the constitution, both opposition parties—the DA '91 and the NDP—put forth their own candidates for the presidency; the DA '91 also put forward its conditions for helping the New Front to get its two-thirds majority. But Lachmon saw no need for any deals. "The constitution," he said, "permits us to deal with these problems." A special People's Assembly (*Verenigde Volksvergadering*), consisting of all members of local, regional, and national assemblies, could be convened in situations such as this. It had the power to choose a President by simple majority (Art. 181). The same *ad hoc* body, he pointed out, could also approve constitutional amendments.

After the members of the National Assembly were sworn in,¹ and Lachmon was chosen, once again, to be its Speaker, Jules Ajodhia was chosen, by simple majority, to become Vice President. Ajodhia had served as Minister of Justice in the Shankar/Arron government and was a rising force within the