

'CHEATED NOT DEFEATED'

Background to British Guiana Election

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gives the background to the imperialist onslaught in British Guinea, which led to the recent rigged elections and the removal of the majority party, Dr. Jagan's People's Progressive Party, from office.

(This article was written on the eve of the elections of December 7th, 1964. The 'proportional representation' system was introduced by the Tory government, against the background of terror and intervention described by Mr. David, in order to ensure the removal of the P.P.P. from office. In the meantime, the Tories themselves were rejected by the British electorate. The Jagan administration appealed to the new Labour government to throw overboard the Tory plan, deliberately engineered to remove fellow-socialists from office, but the appeal fell on deaf ears. Emerging yet again as the strongest party, the P.P.P. increased its total vote to 109,332 and its overall percentage from 42.63 to 45.88—more than the Labour Party had obtained in Britain. Dr. Jagan refused to resign as Prime Minister—so the British government rushed through yet another amendment to the Constitution to force him out and called on Mr. Burnham of the P.N.C. to take over. The People's Progressive Party has, under the slogan 'We were cheated, not defeated', launched a countrywide campaign with the following five demands:

- 1. Release all P.P.P. detainees*
- 2. Reorganise police and security forces to reflect the broad masses*
- 3. New constitutional arrangements*
- 4. Change the electoral system and hold new elections*
- 5. Right to vote at the age of eighteen.*

'There can be no stable government without the P.P.P.,' declared Dr. Jagan.)

WHEN ANALYSING the present political crisis in British Guiana, we must look in retrospect at the development of the national liberation movement in Guiana and of the People's Progressive Party (P.P.P.) which has won three consecutive general elections and has led this movement up to the present day.

The P.P.P. was formed in 1948 and the present leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, was directly responsible for the formation of the Party. The reasons for the creation of the Party are to be found in the suffering of the Guianese people at the hands of British and American colonialism which has ruled the country ruthlessly from the days when the Afro-Guianese were taken from Africa as slaves and the Indo-Guianese were lured to Guiana as indenture workers to work on the sugar plantations.

It was against this background of hunger, disease and the lack of educational facilities for the masses of the Guianese people that the P.P.P. was born.

By 1953, the newly formed P.P.P. was able to unite the entire working class in our country who had been languishing for honest leadership. Before this period many so-called working class leaders had masqueraded before the workers. But because of their insincerity the employers continued to reap huge profits from our country. The large sugar factory owners were able to expand rapidly by opening chain stores throughout British Guiana and sent millions upon millions back to Britain. In fact British Guiana was known as Bookers Guiana (the name of one of the largest sugar companies dominating the sugar industry of the country).

General elections were held in 1953 under adult suffrage which was introduced the same year, at the demand of the P.P.P., and the P.P.P. was elected to office with a landslide majority. This victory alarmed the local sugar barons who undoubtedly had a strong lobby in the British Parliament. The American Government was also up in arms because of the aims of the newly formed P.P.P. to transfer Guiana and its economy from a backward colonial territory to a socialist state where the means of production distribution and exchange would be owned and controlled by the working people.

After only 133 days in office—Westminster and Washington shouted 'communism', 'communism', and Dr. Jagan and his young Government were forcibly thrown out. British battleships and soldiers took over the country. The constitution was suspended. Dr. Jagan himself was gaoled. His wife who was the General Secretary of the P.P.P. was also sent to prison. Wholesale detentions and arrests were the order of the day. Police harassment and imprisonment of all the militant leaders were carried out against the P.P.P.

The British Government handpicked a number of known stooges—men who the workers had rejected at the polls during the elections—to do its bidding. An interim Government was created. One of the first pieces of legislation passed by this group of lackeys was the subversive literature Bill banning the importation and sale of any Marxist literature—newspapers or any publication which attacked British and American imperialism and pointed the way to a better way of life under a socialist economic system.

The British and American imperialists feared a socialist Government in South America. During the life of the interim Government 1953–57 there existed a period of the restriction of the militant leaders of the national liberation movement. Books and literature were seized from the homes of known P.P.P. supporters.

The British Government injected large sums of money into the economy of the country. This was done with the hope of weaning support from the P.P.P. Some agricultural schemes were attempted with the hope of creating a middle class peasantry which would act as a buffer between the huge sugar companies and the sugar workers who form the largest section of Guiana's proletariat. A housing programme was also started, which temporarily alleviated unemployment among a small section of the urban workers.

These imperialist efforts failed to break the support for the P.P.P., but in 1955 the British and American ruling class were successful in splitting the Party. The People's National Congress (P.N.C.) was born. Mr. Forbes Burnham the present leader of this Party was, until the split, the chairman of the P.P.P. and was the Minister of Education in Dr. Jagan's first Government in 1953.

The Anglo-U.S. imperialists acted true to form. They successfully played off what they called the 'moderates' against the so-called 'extremists'. A section of the Guianese workers was then led by a group of middle class Afro-Guianese intellectuals.

The imperialists thereafter stepped up their work to establish a permanent division of the working class. They also encouraged the germination of an extreme right wing party. But this right wing party never really developed until after 1961. It is now led by a wealthy Roman Catholic businessman by the name of Peter D'Aguiar. It is important to note that the Roman Catholic Church is the real leader of this party.

Simultaneously with the development of this third party a consistent effort was made to co-ordinate the work of the religious organizations which had been carrying on anti-government activities since 1953.

And in recent months large sums of money have been continuously sent to B.G. with the object of organizing three new religious parties—one a Hindu, the other a Muslim Party, and a third is now being organized by Mr. Balwant Singh Rai who was a member of the P.P.P. and Minister of Home Affairs in Dr. Jagan's Government until he was expelled from the P.P.P.

The interim Government held office between 1953 and 1957 and came to an end when the British Government felt certain that they had successfully prepared the ground for the defeat of Dr. Jagan and the P.P.P. Prior to the holding of the 1957 General Elections the constituencies in the P.P.P. stronghold were gerrymandered. Dr. Jagan polled in his own constituency more votes than all the opposition candidates put together. But whereas the opposition secured five seats the P.P.P. only won one. This was a deliberate attempt to defeat the P.P.P. But the overall results of the 1957 elections showed a defeat for the opposition parties and imperialism, and victory for the Guianese working class—the P.P.P.

But imperialism will not accept defeat easily. Every trick and manoeuvre continued to be played against the progressive movement. The P.P.P. ran the country from 1957 to 1961. During this period the Government was unable to carry out any large scale economic development, though very many schools were built and agricultural schemes developed. Large amounts of lands were given to the landless peasants, and rural electrification began. However, the British and American Governments refused aid or large loans to British Guiana, because they did not want to strengthen the position of the P.P.P. and the Government.

By 1961, Dr. Jagan's Government had succeeded in its demand for a fully internal self-governing constitution, reluctantly conceded by the British Government. In the same year new General Elections were held, and again the P.P.P. was returned to power. The workers were convinced that the P.P.P. was working in their interests.

BLATANT INTERFERENCE

During the 1961 election campaign the most blatant interference in Guiana's internal affairs was perpetrated by the British and U.S. Governments. Large quantities of U.S. dollars were sent to the Opposition Parties—vehicles, electrical equipment, anti-communist literature were supplied to assist to defeat the P.P.P. The christian anti-communist crusade alone admitted spending seventy-six thousand U.S. dollars in support of the Opposition Parties.

It was an open secret that the C.I.A. and the British Intelligence Organizations collaborated with the Opposition with the hope of defeating

the P.P.P. Anti-communist films were nightly features all over British Guiana. The radio, and newspapers all came out in full force against the so-called 'red menace' which was supposed to be threatening the country and the entire continent.

Members of the McCarthyite organization of the U.S.A. visited the country, all with the hope of influencing the electorate. Two anti-communists, Dr. Schwartz and Dr. Sluis from the Anti-communist Crusade, visited the country on several occasions and spent a very long period organizing the Opposition.

Later, the U.S. Government, in conjunction with the British Government, and acting through the I.C.F.T.U., organized an economic blockade against British Guiana. All affiliates of the I.C.F.T.U. in other countries were instructed to assist in the blockade. This exercise was carried out in order to force the resignation of Dr. Jagan's Government. This occurred during 1961-62. That year saw the passing in both chambers of the legislature a demand for political independence. The British Government got out of fixing a date for independence by helping to instigate a so-called general strike. During this same period the Government was introducing a motion in the legislative Assembly which is known as the 'Labour Relations Bill'. This Bill intended to increase taxation; and thus raise some capital for much needed economic development. The British and American Governments in collaboration with the Opposition political Parties, encouraged the British Guiana Trades Union Congress to call a general strike to oppose the Bill and this was done with the sole objective of harrassing the Government. To some extent the imperialists succeeded. The strike lasted for eighty-three days.

Sections of the economy were badly affected. Some employers actually paid the workers their wages when they were on strike. Others lent their employees some money so that they could meet their domestic obligations. Also during this period the lumpen proletariat was encouraged to burn the business section of the capital, looted business places and attacked innocent supporters of the Government. Some Government supporters were murdered, some raped, and some badly injured.

After the crisis and chaos in the country, the British Government sent out a 'Commonwealth Commission' of three eminent jurists from Ghana, the U.K. and India. It is interesting to note a section of this commission's report:

The Trade Union movement and the Opposition parties were arraigned against the Government, each for reasons of their own. The United Force and the commercial people were actuated by personal motives rather than

ideological difference. The leaders of the P.N.C., the main opposition party, were actuated by the failure of their ambitions and realization that there was no future for them as Dr. Jagan's allies and supporters. Mr. L. F. S. Burnham the leader of the P.N.C. was himself spurred on by a desire to assert himself in public life and to establish a more important and more rewarding position for himself and bring about Dr. Jagan's downfall.

The British Government, having failed to find anything to discredit the Government of Dr. Jagan, sought new opportunities to defeat the P.P.P. When independence talks were again held in London during the autumn of 1963, the British Tories ignored the question of independence, and instead imposed the holding of new elections under a system of Proportional Representation (P.R.). This undemocratic step was taken regardless of the fact that under the British Guiana Constitution new elections were not yet due; and in spite of the protestations of the Government delegation. P.R. was demanded by the Opposition Parties, but it is a well known fact that this new electoral system was first asked for by one of the representatives of the sugar monopolies in British Guiana. The introduction of the new electoral system was the climax of an international imperialist conspiracy designed solely to defeat the P.P.P., and bring the Opposition to power.

The Government and the P.P.P. vigorously opposed this new tactic. Country-wide rallies and demonstrations were held in protest against this blatant interference in British Guiana's internal affairs. It is necessary to re-state that British Guiana is fully internally self-governing; and it was entirely unconstitutional for Mr. Duncan Sandys to take any steps concerning new elections or a different electoral system without the consent of the British Guiana Government. It is indeed a convention of the British Parliament dating from the middle of the nineteenth century, that their Government cannot and should not interfere with the constitution of a self-governing territory without the consent of the elected Government.

The same British Government refused to interfere with the constitution of Southern Rhodesia because it is said that Southern Rhodesia is internally self-governing. But it is quite clear that if the Government of a self-governing territory is working in the interest of the British capitalists—even though that Government is undemocratic and refuses to allow the majority of Africans their inalienable right to partake in the governing of their country, the British Conservative Government is prepared to support a small group of white extremists to suppress by force the majority of African workers.

This is a typical example of British capitalist hypocrisy.

But in British Guiana the political situation moves very rapidly. The past six months saw the longest general strike in the sugar industry in the history of British Guiana. The strike lasted 155 days.

The sugar workers are in revolt against a corrupt union—the Manpower Citizens' Association (M.P.C.A.). The workers are rejecting this union because it serves the employers and not the working people. Simultaneously the workers are demanding that the employers give recognition to the Guiana Agricultural Workers Union (G.A.W.U.) which is being led by P.P.P. Assemblyman Mr. Harrylall.

TERROR METHODS

This strike again was opposed by the imperialist forces, and their 'sabotage gangs' were used to murder and maim literally thousands of supporters of the Government. Terrorists threw bombs and hand grenades into the homes of Government supporters. Many others were shot going about their lawful business. Thousands of homes were completely burnt to the ground and some victims were shot by thugs when they were trying to leave the burning buildings. For example, in the mining town of Wismar, which is sixty-five miles from Georgetown and about forty miles from the nearest sugar estate, the Opposition parties organized their supporters to destroy by fire 1,500 houses of Government supporters, and 2,000 workers from this district had to flee to Georgetown to save their lives. Women and children were raped during this episode, beaten and murdered. The police and the British troops who were armed stood by and watched genocide being committed against these innocent people and did not intervene to assist them.

British Guiana was faced with its first refugee problem.

The P.P.P. and the Government have had and are still having the problem of trying to rehabilitate these victims. On the other hand, when the Government supporters try to protect their lives and their families, and defend their homes, the police and the British troops use brutal measures against them. Flogging and modern methods of torture are not uncommon. The State machinery is carrying out its role true to form. The judiciary is extremely hostile to the Government. And a situation is now reached where supporters of the Government often do not seek redress in the Courts as they know only too well that the dice are loaded heavily against them.

The British Government, in its attempt to defeat the Government and to discredit the P.P.P., arrested and detained thirty-six members of the P.P.P. including the Deputy Premier, Mr. Brindley Benn, Minister of Agriculture, Forests and Lands, and Leader of the Legislative Assembly. At the time of his arrest he was also acting Minister of Home Affairs. In all, five P.P.P. Legislators were detained. This in effect

removed the majority that Dr. Jagan's Government had in the House of Assembly. Mr. Harrylall President of the progressive G.A.W.U., who is also a Legislator, and his General Secretary, Mrs. Philomena Sahoye, were also among the detainees.

What the imperialists could not have done by way of the ballot, they did by force. Since the supporters of the Government have been detained, the Opposition 'terror campaign' developed tremendously. Freedom House, the Headquarters of the P.P.P., was bombed and a section of the building was destroyed; one member of the Party died during this explosion and several were injured. Also a firm supporting the Government was bombed almost simultaneously with the Party Headquarters, when again one member died and several were injured. These explosions took place at the same time that the Premier had called a meeting of the two Opposition leaders, Mr. Forbes Burnham and Mr. Peter D'Aguiar in order to find a formula to end the crisis in the country. These two particular bomb attacks demonstrated that the Anglo-U.S. imperialists do not want a democratic settlement of the problems of British Guiana. They so far have profited by confusion and chaos. The exploitation of our minerals continued unabated.

The imperialists and their local agents—the P.N.C. and the U.F., have to some extent succeeded in encouraging Afro-Guianese to attack Indo-Guianese. These attacks have led to counter attacks and racialism has raised its ugly head to an alarming extent among the Guianese people. The British and U.S. ruling classes are playing their famous game of 'divide and rule'. But in spite of the development of racialism the Afro-Guianese supporters of the P.P.P. are still there and are growing. And many more Guianese are beginning to understand how imperialism works by creating divisions among the toiling masses.

With the hope of bringing the crisis in British Guiana to an end the leader of the P.P.P., Dr. Cheddi Jagan, put forward the following proposals to Mr. Burnham:

Council of Ministers: The P.P.P. and the P.N.C. to have an equal number of Ministries—five to each party—with the Leader of the P.P.P. being Premier, and the Leader of the P.N.C. being Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier shall be the Leader of the Legislative Assembly. The term of office of the coalition government is to be two, three or four years with a minimum period until August 1965, the life of the present Government.

It is my considered view that in the charged atmosphere of today a holding government for a short period until the proposed general elections later this year will not suffice to create the unity, peace and harmony which are so necessary today at all levels. It is my view that the coalition should continue after the next general elections on an agreed basis and that the Party Leader of the majority Party should be the Prime Minister and the other Leader, the Deputy Prime Minister.

On independence, the Ministry of Home Affairs should go to one Party with a Junior Minister to the other Party; the Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministry should go to the Party which does not hold the Home Affairs Ministry, and Junior Minister to the other Party.

Head of State: On Independence the Head of State should be mutually agreed upon by all Parties.

House of Assembly: The future House of Assembly is to be made up on the Surinam model of a combination of the first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems. I suggest the existing thirty-five constituencies to be the basis of new general elections at a time to be mutually agreed upon. In addition, there should be seventeen seats allocated to each party on the basis of the votes polled with the proviso that no party would share in the allocation of these seats unless it polled a minimum of 15 per cent of total, valid votes cast. This proviso is in keeping with your proposals to the Constitution Committee of 1959 for the prevention of fragmentation and the formation of a multiplicity of parties. It is also in keeping with our present electoral laws which cause a candidate to forfeit his deposit if he or she does not obtain 15 per cent of the total votes cast in the constituency.

Senate: I suggest that the Senate be reconstituted as follows:

Six P.P.P., four P.N.C., one U.F., and two others (Messrs. Tasker and Too-Chung).

United Nations Presence: Between now and Independence there should be a United Nations Presence in British Guiana. During this interim period all preparatory steps must be taken to create with the help of the United Nations and British Commonwealth territories, Security, Police and Defence Forces, and institutions in which there is public confidence.

Agreed Programme: The P.N.C. and the P.P.P. should immediately set to work to produce an agreed programme based on a domestic policy of democracy and socialism, and a foreign policy of non-alignment. A Central Committee and various sub-committees should be established to produce a detailed domestic programme within two months.

British Government: Immediate representation should be made to the British Government for the latter's agreement to electoral reform and other arrangements proposed above.

Mr. Burnham rejected these proposals. I believe that because the imperialists are determined to defeat Dr. Jagan's Government, Mr. Burnham has not been given much scope for manoeuvre by them, and thus he again cannot accept the proposals of Dr. Jagan. These proposals would have given Mr. Burnham's Party the P.N.C., a majority in the Senate, and half of the Ministeries with important veto powers over the cabinet.

Instead of accepting these proposals, the main Opposition Party intensified their terrorist campaign. This was clearly revealed when the Commissioner of Police for British Guiana, Mr. Peter Owen, made the following statement on August 17th 1964:

The Police of British Guiana have detained nine men following the discovery early last week in a Georgetown Guest House of an arms cache

which included large quantities of police ammunition, gelignite, and time-bomb devices.

Among the detainees are two former senior Police Officers, a Deputy Superintendent and an ex-Inspector. All the detainees are linked with the Opposition Party, the People's National Congress.

On September 1st, Mr. Peter Owen made a further statement in an affidavit to the Supreme Court, that the country's main Opposition Party, the P.N.C., had a terrorist gang responsible for a 'series of crimes such as murder, arson, causing explosions to buildings and subversive and criminal activities'.

Following this dramatic disclosure, five P.P.P. detainees, among them the Deputy Premier, Mr. B. H. Benn, and Mrs. Philomena Sahoye, General Secretary of the G.A.W.U., were released. But the majority of the P.P.P. prisoners were still held, in spite of this information which had come to the notice of the public.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

The political problems of British Guiana must be seen within the context of the entire South American continent. There is a dilemma facing imperialism in this region. British Guiana is situated on the mainland of South America, and the socialist intentions of Dr. Jagan's Government and Party are terrifying to the British and American Governments. Also the successful trading agreements that were made with the Cuban Government are angering particularly the American Government. The American Government has been able to get some of the reactionary, and some Fascist Governments of Latin American countries to cut off trading and in some cases diplomatic relations with Cuba. But all the U.S. administration pressures and blackmail failed to divert the Government of Dr. Jagan from its fraternal contacts with the Cuban Government and people.

Also the American imperialists are facing armed revolts in Venezuela led by the national liberation movement, and the Anglo-U.S. Governments fear that if independence is won by Dr. Jagan's Government this would mean a further blow to U.S. domination. They are also fearing that British Guiana could be a socialist spearhead on the mainland of South America. In Chile and other Latin American countries, the workers are in revolt, and the imperialists are worried about socialist internationalism from an independent Guiana. And their attitude is 'come-what-may' British Guiana must be prevented from gaining independence under Dr. Jagan in this strategic part of the Western Hemisphere.

In recent months the U.S. Government has become more emboldened since it successfully organized the overthrow of President

Goulart's Government of Brazil, and thus they are using all tactics, military and subversive, to defeat the P.P.P. Government. But in order to construct a facade for their criminal work the last British Government was preparing the conditions for a rigged general election this year in British Guiana. The date which the ex-Tory Government set for the elections was December 7th. But the holding of elections would not solve the problems of British Guiana. What is necessary is political independence with a P.P.P. Government in office.

At the present moment Guiana is in need of solidarity from all colonial and ex-colonial countries—in fact all peaceloving nations. The Guianese working class are determined to defeat imperialism and capitalism in spite of the overt and covert interference of the British and American Governments. The P.P.P. led by Dr. Jagan will establish socialism on the mainland of South America. But one fundamental question that is now the concern of the Guianese socialists is whether Anglo-U.S. imperialism will permit British Guiana's transition to socialism via parliament.

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