

Guyana the lost revolution?

INTRODUCTION TO ESSAYS ON THE WEST INDIAN REVOLUTION - by G. Dash (Continuing our series of social-political comments and news on Guyana and the West Indies)

In the West Indies, a curious but familiar drama is being played out. The word is going forth to West Indian exiles to, through a concatenation of circumstances which have bared the myths of pleasant idyllic life among the lush tropical islands, re-examined their position vis-a-vis the revolutionary struggle sweeping the rest of the Caribbean. We have seen riots in Jamaica, discontent in Trinidad, repression in the French West Indies and treachery and collusion with imperialism in Guyana.

The West Indian masses have been fed a dream which, faced with the harsh light of reality, has been slowly dissipating from their consciousness. They have been taught to believe that they have been led by black governments in independent countries. But for the thinking man, this has been a myth. Neo-colonialism has crept into the West Indian society. We have been taught that we were unlike the people in the rest of the world. We live in an idyllic paradise, happy and care-free in the sunlight and cool breezes, to play our steel bands all day.

But we who have suffered know this is nothing but a skillfully-woven tissue of lies, which is beginning to dawn on us. Our West Indian society is riddled with class and caste distinctions, our workers are paid starvation wages, our governments are provincial and politically unimaginative. Testimony of this psycho-sociological hell is in the number, ever increasing, of West Indian emigrants who have fled to North America and England to escape the tropical paradises.

In Jamaica, the peasant and the urban workers eke out a tenuous existence under socially repugnant conditions, only eased temporarily when some more fortunate relative helps them to emigrate to another country, where they invariably face prejudice and experience the limbo-like existence of despised aliens in a foreign land.

But the West Indian masses, contrary to the hopes and beliefs of their treacherous leaders, are not fooled. The example of Cuba's revolution has touched them more deeply than even they will allow themselves to admit. Conditions in the West Indies and Guyana where foreign interests and capitalist monopolies are burgeoning, are reaching the crucial stage where the masses can begin the liberating process of, at least mentally exploring the possibilities of a change. In Jamaica, the conditions are ripening for armed struggle. In Guyana, the stage had been reached long ago, but thanks to the skillful manipulation of the Central Intelligence Agency and the treachery and collusion with imperialism of certain political leaders against a popular peoples' party, the liberation movement

has been stymied - temporarily. But never at any time have the Guyanese people been particularly noted for stupidity.

Among the many fissiparous exile groups of West Indian origin, the tendency has been to become preoccupied with the black-white syndrome and to concern themselves too much with competing to see who can best verbally combat the white man, and ignore the important trends in their various countries.

Jamaica in 1968 shattered many complacent cocoons of well-being in the Caribbean sphere. The riots over Dr. Rodney's exclusion from Jamaica, the increasing police brutality, the rising militance of West Indian students, unheard of even a year ago, and the repressive direction of the puppet Guyanese government has stirred the West Indian masses. They are now beginning to wonder about their leaders. As the liberation movement gains strength in Latin America and the oligarchs put on their pressure, the West Indian masses are starting to look at their previously much-touted leaders with critical eyes. The throwing together of large masses of West Indian immigrants in England, the United States and Canada and their subsequent encounters with race prejudice are forcing them to think. Jamaican and Guyanese and Trinidadian receive similar treatment in alien lands and they begin to see that the same people who deny them full rights abroad are the same people who are exploiting their countries and controlling their leaders at home. This acts as a wonderful crucible to mix the potentially revolutionary characteristics of the exile West Indian community. Forced by stringent immigration laws to be of a high intellectual and skilled standards also aids the immigrant to wonder why the capitalist exploiters managed to get away with so much at home, while they, the exploited, receive the other end of the stick in the capitalists' countries.

There is, however, a dangerous direction this discontent can take. It is easy for the West Indian immigrant, invariably non-white, to look at his problems through a black-white prism. He will then unintentionally bypass and easily be led down the non-political path of racial solutions, whereas the conditions that face us at home are largely socio-political. There is a definite need for an educational, political movement to redirect this animosity and dissidence into political channels.

Among the students there is great potential for the forging of a unified political weapon to strike within the West Indies and Guyana. No longer must we hear of Trinidad-Canadian and Jamaica-American cultural movements, but a political movement embracing the whole of the West Indies, which will cut across the blindness of insularity and cheap chauvinism which is very much a part of the West Indian psyche.

In 1953 Guyana had the most advanced constitution in the British West Indies. General elections under that constitution were held in 1953 and the popular Peoples' Progressive Party, under the leadership of Cheddi Bharat Jagan, a young dentist of peasant origin, won by a landslide.

This victory represented a victory for the people, the broad mass of working class elements against the forces of reaction, King Sugar and bourgeois indolence. Jagan's victory was significant in that the two major race groups, the East Indians and the Africans, were united as never before behind him.

Within weeks Jagan's government was overthrown, the constitution revoked and British Marines sent to keep the natives in their place. There were demonstrations in the streets and the people called for resistance, and Jagan and some of his ministers were jailed for subversion. The forces of big business and reaction had succeeded in once more delaying the people.



This was the major turning point in the Guyana Liberation Movement. The PPP, which then had the masses behind as never before (and never again) refused to take the ultimate step of true revolutionary parties and defend the peoples' victory. As a result of the PPP's hesitation to take the road of armed struggle at an historic moment the enemies of the people gained the upper hand. Fissiparous elements in the PPP rallied around Forbes Burnham who broke away and joined with the reactionary bourgeois National Democratic Party (whose leaders included John Carter, at present Guyana's ambassador to the US and Canada who expressed his strongly pro-American views in Roi Ottley's book "No Green Pastures") which later became the Peoples' National Congress.

As a result of Burnham's treachery, the people, aided by imperialism's agents, rallied around the two sections along racial lines. The overwhelming majority of East Indians stayed with the PPP while a large group of blacks joined Burnham. The way was now clear for the imperialists to intrigue against the Liberation Movement through the racial slant now apparent.

Nevertheless, despite this racial division in the people and its subsequent consequences for the Liberation Movement, a large residue of dedicated hard core blacks stayed within the PPP. Many still clandestinely support the PPP to this day.

Had the Peoples' Progressive Party at that crucial historic phase in 1953, as a party exercised its discipline on the divisive racial element and initiated an armed resistance against the British occupation forces while the people were together and politically ready, the history of Guyana's struggle would have been altered drastically.

However, the PPP as a vanguard party had fallen into (and without evidence to the contrary, still remains in) the restrictive process of thinking their victory can come out of the ballot box. They had become, as one eloquent Jamaican peasant has put it, "X-idiots".

History of the past decades has shown (Arbenz in Guatemala, for example) that no peoples' party can hope to come to power in this hemisphere, preach and attempt to practice reform and stay in power. The United States in its medieval-type crusade against liberation movements sees to this. Despite the fact that the Peoples' Progressive Party has repeatedly won elections with a majority, its power to rule the country effectively has been consistently castrated culminating in the rigged electoral system of 1964 when "proportional representation" was introduced.

The PPP's mistake and Guyana's suffering has been due to the party's ineffectiveness in dealing with the divide-and-rule concept fostered by imperialism. Once this dichotomy had been performed on the black and Indian working class, it eased the forces of reaction into prominence. This is testimony of naivete and shortsightedness on the part of the Guyana Left in regards to power politics.

The 1960s saw an increase to horrendous proportions of political violence in Guyana. Armed groups had been formed within the opposing parties, largely composed of youths, many believing in their youthful idealism that they would be the vanguard in a true socialist revolution.

In the PNC the armed group was the notorious "X-13", backed by US imperialism. As far back as 1960 agents of imperialism were overseeing the possibility of creating a para-military opposition to Cheddi Jagan. A few of the more political members of this X-13, sensing they were going to be misused, and frustrated by restraints on their thoughts, left the organization and stored their arms away. But that was as far as they went. Instead of aligning themselves with the progressive forces in the PYO, the PPP's youth arm, they remained quiet throughout the racially-tinted violence that was to follow. The PYO on the other hand made halfhearted attempts to recruit dissidents from the PNC with no

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