

# WHAT HAPPENED IN BRITISH GUIANA

by Cheddi Jagan

With a Foreword by  
Jennie Lee, M.P.

THIS unique document, written specially for the Union of Democratic Control, is a statement and a challenge. Dr. Jagan, Prime Minister of British Guiana until the British Government suspended that Colony's Constitution, modestly but forcefully records his own story of what he and his colleagues really tried to do and wanted to achieve; and how they were treated by our Government. The U.D.C. is glad to give Dr. Jagan a platform denied him elsewhere: no thoughtful person in Britain will ignore this clear and careful testimony.

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## FOREWORD

By JENNIE LEE, M.P.

The case against Dr. Jagan and the People's Progressive Party of British Guiana has been put with all the authority the British Government commands. It has been widely publicized by a press which, both here and in Guiana, is heavily biased in favour of the British Government. Dr. Cheddi Jagan has an equal right to be heard. I therefore warmly commend this pamphlet to every man and woman with a sense of fair play.

On October 22nd, 1953, and again on December 7th, 1953, the House of Commons debated the situation in British Guiana which led to the suspension of its constitution. On both occasions lengthy parliamentary papers and other official publications were made available to Members setting out the Colonial Secretary's justification of the drastic step he had taken. It would have enhanced respect for British justice, if, at the same time, a statement had been circulated giving Dr. Jagan's reply to the charges levelled against him. This was not done. Contrary to all our traditions, Dr. Jagan is being treated as if he were guilty until he can prove his innocence. Still more serious, although he has asked to be brought to trial after being accused of conspiracy to set fire to part of Georgetown, he is being denied the opportunity to defend himself in a court of law.

In all this unsavoury morass of unproved charges and counter charges, one thing is clear. Dr. Jagan and those associated with him have aroused the bitter enmity of the sugar planters and other business interests that for generations have exploited the working people of British Guiana. That will warm British workers towards him. They, at least, will want to know what the first Prime Minister to be elected by universal adult suffrage in this part of the colonial empire has to say.

So, too, will all men and women with liberal instincts. I cannot take responsibility for the contents of this pamphlet. That rests solely with Dr. Jagan. But I congratulate the U.D.C. on providing a much-needed platform and am proud to associate myself with all who are concerned to see that in a conflict of this grave nature the arguments on both sides, not just one side, are fairly and fully stated.

## MY OWN STORY

By CHEDDI JAGAN

**B** RITISH naval and military forces are in occupation of British Guiana. The new Constitution, granted early this year, stands suspended. Elected government no longer exists, the House of Assembly is prorogued, meetings are banned. The headquarters of the People's Progressive Party and homes of prominent officials of the P.P.P. have been raided, and five of its leading members are detained in gaol without charge and without trial. The Governor is dictator.

Why?

Our answer to that question is very different from the official answer. But to understand it an understanding of the background of British Guiana is essential.

### What is British Guiana?

British Guiana is about the size of Great Britain. But nine-tenths of its hinterland is unpenetrated forest and savannah; and its narrow coastal belt, some 270 miles long, is where nearly all the population, less than half a million, lives and works.

This population is of mixed origin. According to the last census, East Indians (sprung from imported indentured labour) form about 43 per cent. of the inhabitants; Africans 38 per cent.; mixed or coloured 10 per cent.; the original Amerindians 4 per cent.; and small communities of Portuguese and Chinese approximately 2½ and 1½ per cent. respectively. The British white community is less than 0.66 per cent.

British Guiana lives on the export of primary produce. It is mainly dependent on one cash crop—which is sugar. Its secondary export resources are timber and minerals—bauxite, diamonds, gold, manganese and iron ore, and some columbite-tantalite. These deposits are now being actively explored, and all exports from them are directed to the dollar countries of Canada and the United States, and to the United Kingdom. Yet only a small part of our U.S. and Canadian dollar earnings are available to us for dollar purchases.

### The Sugar Empire—

British Guiana is run economically—and, up to this year, to a large extent politically—on the classic colonial pattern. The 400 individual sugar estates which existed in 1834 have been amalgamated and reduced to a tight monopoly of twenty-one. Three big companies, all registered in London—Messrs. Booker Bros. McConnell and Co. Ltd.; Messrs. Sandbach, Parker and Co.; and Messrs. S. Davson and Co. Ltd.; all three being organized in the Sugar Producers' Association—own and control twenty of them. The other is small and locally-owned. Between them they own all the sugar-cane factories. They interlock with the bauxite and timber interests.

Booker's, which also has extensive interests in South Africa—has shares in, and one of its directors is chairman of, the largest cattle company, The Rupununi Dev. Co.; has a near monopoly in the drug trade; owns wholesale and retail shops, wharves, garages, and shipping lines; and has its nominees or employees represented in the Legislature on committees, as well as in the press and the radio. Perhaps that is why British Guiana is sometimes called "Booker's Guiana".

These sugar imperialists make big profits. Their balance sheets say so. Their estates cover 155,000 acres; but according to a statement of the Colonial Office in 1953 only 60,000 to 65,000 acres are actually cultivated. The Venn Commission, which was sent out to British Guiana in 1949, stressed this point, appending a map to their report which showed large areas of cultivable but abandoned and derelict land lying between the sugar plantations on the various estates. Yet in 1951, when in the old Legislative Council I introduced a motion which sought to withdraw the leases or, alternatively, to tax uncultivated lands held by the sugar estates, it was voted down.

The Venn Report likewise pointed out that these estates were still being run under obsolete conditions. There is hardly any mechanization, neither in the maintenance of the all-important canal system, nor in field processes; and such as there is, in the sugar-cane factories, is out-of-date. And yet the profits are good.

The reason for this lack of machinery is simple: when human beings are cheap, they are more profitable than machines.

#### —And Our Poverty

The people of my country are very poor.

Let us examine a cost-of-living survey carried out in 1942 by a Government-appointed Committee in Albouystown, a working-class area of Georgetown, our capital.

This survey revealed that the average working class family of 4.6 persons earned a total income of B.G. \$7.41 a week, but spent \$8.23. (One B.G. \$ = 4s. 2d.) Nearly 20 per cent. of the 7.41 dollars came not from earnings but from other sources, such as loans, pensions, poor relief, rent, etc. The reason why expenditure exceeded income was that families were living on credit—owing rent to landlords, and money to shop-keepers. Of this expenditure of 8.23 dollars a week *over half* went on food.

In 1953, the wage paid by the Government to male unskilled workers in Georgetown was a little more than two dollars a day (about 8s. 4d.). For males in country, and females in town and country, it was much less. Non-government employees generally got less. Shop girls were paid as little as the equivalent of one pound a week.

On the sugar estates, most work is done on a job or piece basis. Hours are long, and conditions difficult. Workers must walk long distances to work. The wage is roughly two dollars a day—but the work is irregular, and wages over the year work out at about £61 for farm labourers, some twenty pounds more for factory workers, and about £35 a year for women employed in either.

Housing conditions, in the more than temperate words of the Colonial Office, "leave much to be desired, and the growth of population in recent years is making the position steadily worse, as comparatively little new building is taking place."

We can be a little more precise. In 1945, a survey was made of 7,994 houses in Georgetown. Of these, 2,309 were found unfit for human habitation, 5,303 were beyond repair, and only 382 structurally sound! "The average number of persons per room," declared the Cost-of-Living Committee in 1942, "was 2.6. In tenement rooms, however, overcrowding is prevalent, and returns disclose that in certain instances as many as 12 persons live in a single tenement room". "It was estimated," says the Colonial Office, "that 5,765 new houses were needed for replacement, and 1,165 to relieve overcrowding." That was eight years ago. According to the Colonial Office in 1953, "a small municipal scheme *for housing 48 families* has since been carried out" (my italics).

Housing on the sugar estates, where 18 per cent. of the people live, is no better. Most of the workers live in dilapidated barrack-type "ranges", built during the days of slavery.

The same conditions of poverty and deprivation exist where the other needs of life are concerned. It has been *officially* estimated that about 30 per cent. of the population of Georgetown cannot afford to purchase the commodities necessary for a healthy diet.

Educational conditions are bad. They were appallingly illuminated by the Primary Education Policy Report of 1951-52, from which I take the following points. "Classes of sixty rapidly swell in number to eighty and ninety; and classes of over ninety are not uncommon. Under these impossible conditions, education tends to become a mere mockery." Teachers in primary schools numbered 1,799 in 1951, but only 20 per cent. of them were trained.

As for secondary education, which parents must pay for, the Director of Education has lately admitted that "no grammar school education is or can be provided for 99 per cent. of elementary school children".

According to the census of 1946, there were 67 doctors and 33 dentists in the colony (some retired, some near-retiring), for a population of nearly half a million.

There are no health or unemployment insurance schemes. For the unemployed and needy there is poor relief, now dignified by the title "racial assistance"—the magnificent sum of 6s. 3d. per month.

Old Age pensions? Yes, there *are* old age pensions—the splendid sum of 25s. (town) and 16s. 8d. (country) a month, for British subjects over 65 whose income does not exceed 41s. 9d. a month!

Isn't this the old familiar colonial picture all over again—a country living on the export of its raw materials, "owned" by three or four big companies built on the grinding poverty of its inhabitants, with complete neglect of any real development? "Except perhaps for the sugar factories and the Government rice mill," says the Colonial Office, "there is nothing which can be described as large-scale manufacturing industry in British Guiana."

### "Planters' Rule"?

The tentacles of these few monopolist companies reach into every facet of life in British Guiana. The same names crop up again and again.

Consider, for instance, Sir F. J. Seaford, one of Booker's London directors. While in British Guiana he was a director of the Demerara Bauxite Company, as well as a director of Booker's; he was *nominated* to the Legislative and Executive Councils after his defeat at the general election in 1947; and for many years was Chairman of the Drainage Board, which largely controls irrigation policy in the interests of the sugar planters. When he left for England he was succeeded by Mr. F. Morrish of Sandbach, Parker Ltd. and the Demerara Co. Ltd., who also became Chairman of the Drainage Board and he in his turn was replaced by Mr. W. MacNie, who is an example of the common tie-up between officials and big business. At one time a high-ranking government official, Mr. MacNie is now managing director of the Sugar Producers' Association. And such examples could be repeated over and over again.

When we turn to the Press and the radio, the reason for their unremitting hostility to the People's Progressive Party becomes clear. All three daily newspapers in British Guiana have an interlocking directorate of sugar, banking and commercial interests. As far as the preference shareholders of British Guiana United Broadcasting Co. are concerned, the largest block of shares is held by Wm. Fogarty Ltd. The other large shareholders are Booker's, the Argosy Co. Ltd., and Wieting & Richter.

It is against this background of "planters' rule" that the demand for "a new deal", for self-Government, and for self-determination in our Colony has grown—just as it has grown, and is still growing, in other Colonies of the British Empire. It is against this background that militant Trade Unionism has sprung to life; and a new political party, the People's Progressive Party, has developed in order to express and carry out the wishes of the people.

### The Political Background

Before 1950, when the People's Progressive Party was formed, there had been no political party in the country. (At the 1947 elections a Labour Party was got together for election purposes, but was dissolved immediately after the election.)

For a good many years the people in British Guiana had been led by racialist organizations—the East Indian Association and the League of Coloured Peoples. These two bodies restricted their appeal to the East Indians and the Africans respectively, who constituted about equal parts of the population, approximately 40 per cent. Africans were well entrenched in the civil service, police force, the teaching profession, and other Government undertakings. Indians, on the other hand, were predominantly rice farmers and sugar estate workers. Those who succeeded in rising out of these occupations became business men, professional men, and landlords. For both races, leadership came from these middle and professional classes. Rivalries were allowed to grow up between the

Indians and Africans, and were encouraged by compromising and narrowly nationalist leadership.

As a member of the old Legislative Council I saw the need, soon after the elections in 1947, for bringing together all progressives into one party which would not pursue a racialist line but would fight on class lines, advancing a programme on behalf of the working people against the planters and vested interests. Out of the Political Affairs Committee, formed in 1946 to demand constitutional and other reforms, the People's Progressive Party was born in January 1950. It succeeded in uniting all the racial groups, and launched a vigorous campaign.

The growing demands of the Guianese people for control of their own future could no longer be ignored. A commission, sent out by the Labour Government in 1948 to study the question (Sir E. J. Waddington, Professor Harlow and Dr. Rita Hinden), recommended that the limited franchise, based on a literacy and property test, should be swept away; and that full adult suffrage and a two-Chamber Legislative system should be introduced. This Waddington Constitution, as it was called, made provision for three bodies: the Executive Council, the House of Assembly, and a revisionary body or Upper House, called the State Council.

The Executive consisted of the Governor, who had a casting vote, the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary, and the Attorney-General—all appointed officials, who, between them, would handle the most important and strategic questions—Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Defence and Police, Information, Law and Order, and Finance. Other members of the Executive would include one nominated Minister without Portfolio, and six Ministers elected from the House of Assembly and responsible for different departments.

The House of Assembly would be composed of twenty-four elected members, together with the three Official Ministers; while the State Council or Upper House, would comprise six members nominated by the Governor, and three appointed by him from the House of Assembly—two on the recommendation of the Government party, one on the recommendation of Opposition.

From the outset, our Party opposed the Waddington Constitution. The effective power of the Government to carry through any fundamental measures was so limited and hedged about by a system of checks and balances, including the power of the State Council to delay all bills for a year, reinforced by the Governor's final power of veto, that it would be impossible to make any significant changes in the structure of economic power in the Colony. As a socialist party we felt that such changes—possible nationalization of sugar, or direct taxation of sugar interests, schemes for diversified agriculture and so forth—were essential if there was to be any real improvement in the condition of the people.

Nor could we see any reason why we should not be granted a constitution at least as liberal as the constitution which the Dutch had already granted to our neighbouring territory of Surinam, which embodied none of the objectionable features of our own. Their Government is responsible only to their freely elected legislature. There is no nominated Upper House. There is no voting power for the Governor—the very post is

abolished—and the Executive is made up entirely of elected members of the Legislative Council. With the exception of defence and foreign relations, their autonomy is absolute.

The "checks and balances" written into the Waddington Constitution are fundamentally designed to maintain the *status quo*—to protect the imperialist interest of the British Government, with its need for primary-producing colonies with which to meet Britain's dollar deficit; and to protect the capitalist class in the Colony, whose profits lie in the same direction.

Despite our opposition—I was the only one to oppose it in the Legislature—the Waddington Constitution came into force in January 1953, and the first general election based on universal adult suffrage took place in April 1953.

### What We Wanted

Our Party went into this election with a definite programme, however, that was both straightforward and constitutional.

In the social sphere our programme included a *social security scheme*: first steps towards a free health service and workmen's compensation to cover industrial diseases; and speedier implementation of the Factories Ordinance.

In *education*, we campaigned for government-controlled and secular education (252 of the 269 State-aided primary schools are in the hands of one or other of the religious denominations), although we accepted religious education in the schools; more secondary scholarships; and the provision of nursery schools.

In *farming*, our proposed measures included land reform, land settlement, security of tenure for farmers and provisions for agricultural loans. We demanded a centrally planned drainage and irrigation scheme—so as to make available for agriculture large tracts of hitherto uncultivated land—in place of specific schemes mainly designed to benefit the sugar estates.

In *housing*, we wanted low rental building schemes. In *administration*, we wanted reform of local government, introduction of universal suffrage, and better control of the expenditure of the Public Works Department, and enquiry into its administration. In *finance*, we wanted an increase of direct taxes accompanied by reduction of indirect taxes. And in *industry*, we wanted the establishment of industries.

Our intention to amend all existing laws and regulations which restricted the civil liberties of the people—such as the banning of individuals, books and films—and our intention to pass laws to protect trade unions, including the repeal of the Trade Disputes (Essential Services) Ordinance and a measure for the recognition of trade unions based on the U.S. Labour Relations Act, were clearly laid down in our election programme as part of our appeal to the people.

In view of the constant accusations of Communism that have been brought against us, is it too much to ask any reader to glance through that list again, and question themselves whether there is anything in it that has not been proposed at one time or another by Labour or Social Democratic

governments in Great Britain and elsewhere? Is there in it any long-term aim which has not been considered desirable by any Socialist movement or party?

But the Opposition Press—that is, the whole of the Press—promptly raised the cry of Communism, and devoted most of their attacks to the irrelevant but familiar issues of Soviet Russia, totalitarianism, forced labour camps, international plots, and so forth. They made great play with the visits of some of our members abroad. The electorate was certainly given every opportunity of scrutinizing our activities, judging these issues, and making up their own minds on the importance to be attached to them.

They made up their minds. In April, we were elected with an absolute majority. We won eighteen out of the twenty-four seats in the House of Assembly.

Elected with this absolute majority, we proceeded to implement our electoral programme. Precisely that!

### What We Did

We repealed the law empowering literature and films to be prohibited, and private mails to be opened. We allowed West Indians who had previously been banned to enter the Colony, if they wished. We passed legislation enforcing recognition for collective bargaining with trade unions enjoying majority support, as in Canada.

We campaigned to remove church control of schools, but proposed to allow religious instruction in them. We tightened up on Public Works expenditure; curtailed unnecessary house building for senior Government officials; and initiated legislation to reform local government by introducing adult suffrage, and by abolishing the system of nominated members.

By negotiation, we succeeded in increasing the royalty on the proposed hydro-electric station, and were preparing an increase of royalties and of taxation of mineral resources.

We introduced legislation to suspend the Essential Services Act, and were drafting plans for a National Labour Board to provide for compulsory arbitration.

We set up committees to investigate the domestic workers' problem, the revision of Workmen's Compensation Ordinance, and machine pools for farmers.

We appointed ordinary people to Government boards and committees.

What else did we do? We increased loans to farmers. We passed an amendment to the Security of Tenure (Rice Farmers) Ordinance in order to help the farmers during drought. We began a revision of fees of government doctors in order to help the poor. We advocated jobs for local men in the police force and in other categories. We did not think it necessary to send delegates to meet the Queen in Jamaica. Two delegates and their wives were sent to the Coronation Celebration in London: in British Guiana, from \$50,000 to \$100,000 was incurred on Coronation Expenditure.

We refused to grant leases of Crown lands to landlords already pos-

sessing large holdings. We refused payment to members of the State Council—as was recommended by the Constitution Commission. I went to Surinam to secure rights for Guianese fisherman in Dutch Guiana waters. We increased the number of scholarships known as People's Scholarships. (There are no university facilities of any kind in British Guiana, and the Government had provided exactly two scholarships a year—one for boys and one for girls—for University training.)

#### Our Gradualism

We did not, of course, expect to put the whole of our programme through immediately, but in a series of slowly progressing measures. We were under no misapprehension about the determined hostility to our whole policy of imperialist and big business interests in the Colony. We were perfectly well aware that the sugar and mining interests would fight our plans every step of the way by all means in their power, aided by the power of the State Council, or Upper House, to hold up any bill for twelve months; and reinforced by the final power of veto reserved to the Governor.

And we know equally well, as the Labour Party and every other progressive party in the modern world has known, that to carry out far-reaching plans for a Socialist reconstruction of the country, the people must be behind us. From a long-term point of view, for the building of a strong and united party and effective trade unions, the work of explanation, propaganda and organization has to go steadily forward.

Consequently, we made it our business to keep in close contact with the people, visiting the countryside regularly, informing them of our activities and plans, and pointing out the constitutional checks and the other difficulties that stood in our way. We prepared the minds of people for this struggle by educating them in P.P.P. groups. We encouraged reading and discussion. Our party membership doubled, and organized groups grew to one hundred.

Our opponents have suggested that, as Ministers, it was unsuitable for those of our members who had official positions in Trade Unions to continue to occupy them during our term of power. Frankly, we felt in the present stage of Trade Union development that we could not accept this view. A strong and militant Socialist movement is bound up with a strong and militant Trade Union movement. Ours in British Guiana is in its early stages of development, facing much the same kind of obstacles and enemies as British workers faced in the time of the Combination Acts over a century ago. We felt it was essential that those experienced in trade union leadership should retain their union positions for some time yet—unnecessary though this might be in countries where trade unionism is fully established. (Please note too, that Mr. A. Bustamante, who is Chief Minister in the Jamaica Government, is president for life of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union.)

The whole world now knows what has happened. Only some four months after we had taken office, without warning, we woke up to hear that troops were being dispatched to British Guiana. A few days later this

rumour became a reality. On October 8th, 1953, troops landed in British Guiana. On October 9th the Constitution was suspended, Ministers were dismissed, and the Governor became a dictator.

To justify this action, Her Majesty's Government then published a White Paper, and the issue was debated in the House of Commons.

What are the main charges against our Government? They can be divided into three sections.

#### Our Fight for Trade Unionism

First, it is alleged that we fomented strikes for political ends, and that we attempted to oust established trade unions by legislative action.

It is difficult to know why the charge of fomenting strike action should have been brought against us—since we had obtained such a big parliamentary majority as to allow us to carry our plans without resort to strike action. The White Paper alleges that we were attempting by legislation to crush established trade unions. Of the two trade unions in question, it quotes the membership of the Man-Power Citizens' Association (MPCA) as 8,272 as against a membership of 817 for the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU). The impression created is that we were forcing on the employers a union (GIWU) which had no following. What are the facts?

While the White Paper gives the GIWU a membership of 817, the Colonial Office report for 1950 gave it a membership of 3,000. To understand why this Union should have suffered a drop in membership, and, indeed, why in 1950 it had only 3,000 members out of a possible total of 30,000 workers in the sugar industry, is to know the conditions prevailing on the sugar estates. Militant leaders were given trespass notices. They were often ejected from tied "ranges" (houses). In conditions of unemployment and under-employment, fear dominated the workers' lives. The result was that although many supported this Union (GIWU), they did not become members. The election results tell the tale. While the MPCA, which supported the National Democratic Party at the general election, contested 18 seats, it won only two—neither being "sugar constituencies". The GIWU, on the other hand, supported the P.P.P. which put up 18 candidates and won 18 seats, *nine* of which were "sugar constituencies".

This shows that the membership figures for the two Unions give no true indication of the confidence placed in them by workers. In fact, in the Berbice River Constituency, where 70-80 per cent. of the voters are sugar and bauxite workers, the secretary of the MPCA not only lost his seat to the Vice-President of the GIWU, but even lost his deposit!

It is regrettable that the British TUC has come out against us. They claim that we did not support the MPCA, which had collective bargaining agreements with the sugar planters and was affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). The GIWU, it is claimed, was seeking affiliation to the WFTU (World Federation of Trades Unions). Yet the GIWU was formed as long ago as 1947, before either the ICFTU or the P.P.P. began life.

The White Paper charges in paragraph 15 that "Dr. Jagan who had been Treasurer of this Union (MCPA), failing to gain control of it, broke

away and later, under his (Dr. Jagan's) influence, a rival union (the GIWU) was formed, with Dr. J. P. Lachmansingh as President". The fact is that I did not agree with the policy of the MPCA in their very compromising attitude to the employers. In this, as events were to prove, I had overwhelming rank-and-file support.

Everyone in British Guiana had accepted the fact that the MPCA was a company union; but this fact has unfortunately failed to reach the notice of the British TUC.

What labour legislation were we attempting to introduce?

The sugar planters, since 1948, had resisted the recognition of the GIWU, although the GIWU had called annual strikes for recognition. Since 1949, in the Legislative Council, I had been proposing the enactment of legislation that should determine by a poll which union had a majority-following among the workers. But the Government—run by and for the planters—rejected this proposal. The Labour Relations Bill which we later introduced in the House of Assembly was in fact patterned on the Labour Relations Act of the United States, passed during the Roosevelt Administration. We are criticized by the White Paper, it is true, for not adopting the Taft Hartley amendment to this Act, yet the whole Labour Movement in the United States is against the Taft Hartley Act. Indeed, this Act was passed and made law over the veto of President Truman.

The Bill which we introduced would have set up machinery empowering the Commissioner of Labour to take a poll in cases of juridical disputes between two or more unions over the issue of recognition. But whereas in the United States only 51 per cent. of the votes has to be secured for a union to obtain recognition, we had intended that, where one union was already recognized, a challenging union must secure 65 per cent. of the votes to gain recognition. In other words, for the MPCA to remain as bargaining agent for the workers all that it had to do was to obtain 35 per cent. at the poll.

If the figures given in the White Paper for the membership of the MPCA are a true indication of the position in the sugar industry, then clearly it had nothing to fear from such a poll. Yet *this was the Bill* which caused the accusation that we were seeking to suppress established unions. There is little doubt, indeed, that if a poll had been taken, the GIWU would have gained recognition. The election figures as I have shown prove this. But for the sugar planters, of course, this would have been very unwelcome—because they then would have had to deal not with a company union, but with a union led by honest workers.

Up to 1950, the MPCA successfully resisted the affiliation of the GIWU to the British Guiana TUC. In 1952, however, it became affiliated. This same year the British Guiana TUC passed two resolutions; first, asking the Government to enact the trade union law described above; secondly, opposing a motion, introduced in the Legislative Council by Lionel Luckhoo (then President of MPCA) that requested the Government to ban entry into British Guiana of literature which was "subversive and contrary to public interest". At that stage, the MPCA resigned from the TUC, alleging that the TUC was under Communist domination. Significantly, later that same year, Mr. F. Romualdo, regional director of

ORIT (Latin-American counterpart of ICFTU) visited British Guiana. He was met on arrival at the airport by the Secretary of MPCA. He refused to meet the TUC. On departure he also declared that the TUC had become Communist-dominated. As a consequence, the TUC did not pursue affiliation to ICFTU.

#### "Bad Administration"?

The *second major charge* brought against us is that we did not administer the country in the best interest of the people.

In support of this contention it is stated in the White Paper that there was a back-log of work found in the Ministers' desks. Even if this charge were true, it might be recalled that the Ministers had only been in office for four months. Alas, we had the mess and muddle of nearly 150 years of Colonial rule to clear up!

We were also accused of packing boards and committees with members of the P.P.P. This should cause the Labour Movement in Britain little alarm since it amounted to no more than displacing privileged people (such as company directors) by ordinary people (such as workers).

Then we were charged with attempting to get control of the public services. It should be noted that unlike Great Britain, where civil servants work with any Government in power, in British Guiana the Governor and senior civil servants were "the Government"—administering the country for the sugar, mining and commercial interests. Before the election (which returned us to office), these officials had been against us. After the election, they were not only placed in the Cabinet, but were packed into our Ministries. Some worked openly against us. What we desired was something which the late Professor Laski referred to as a "marrying" of the good features of the permanent civil service in Britain, with the "Party" civil service system of the United States.

The fact that 2½ million out of a total of 16 million dollars was withdrawn from the savings banks should cause no surprise. Many of the people who had lost political control in our country resorted to economic sabotage of our Government. They withdrew their savings from the bank and encouraged others, directly or indirectly, to work against us.

Five combines listed in paragraph 24 of the White Paper are said to have withdrawn from British Guiana because they had lost confidence in the Government. In fact we had not yet changed the law or made any new laws affecting those companies. Mining companies leased lands at 1 cent to 7½ cents (¼d. to 4d.) an acre. No customs duties were collected on imported machinery and equipment. There was "tax-holiday" legislation, no income tax being paid for the first 5 years of operation. After the tax-holiday period, there was provision for an accelerated write-off of capital expenditure against profits. What normally would be written off in 20 years was allowed to be written off in 10 years.

Actually, when "Kennemetals International S.A. (Inc.) abandoned an exclusive permission to explore for columbite-tantalite on June 30th", three other American companies applied for a lease of the same lands. The New York Alaska Gold Dredging Company, also mentioned in the

White Paper as having withdrawn, was not actively operating in British Guiana. That Gulf Oil Corporation, and Pan-handle Oil Canada, Ltd., withdrew is not surprising, because official expert advice was that there is no oil in British Guiana. That Ellis Associated Companies abandoned a project involving capital investment of £300,000 is not understood since I had agreed to an initial sum of 100,000 dollars being used to purchase and store lengths of various classes of timber required by this company, as a prelude to its entry into British Guiana.

#### A "Police State"?

The *third major charge* made in the White Paper is that we were undermining the loyalty of the police, and that, by intimidation and force of various kinds, we intended to set up a "one-party Communist State" in British Guiana. On May 3rd, I am quoted in the White Paper as saying, "Comrades, in the past when we asked for bread we were given bullets and those who fired at workers were honoured by the master. But when the P.P.P. gets into power the same bullets which were fired on those poor people will be fired on our oppressors. We shall organize a police force. It will be known as the People's Police."

In the past the police were used as instruments of oppression against the workers. Sugar workers were shot at the plantations of Leonora, Riumveldt and, as recently as 1948, Enmore. The Government Committee which was set up to enquire into the shooting said: "We are, however, of the opinion that the evidence has established that after the first few shots there was firing which went beyond the requirement of the situation, with the result that Pooran noticeably, and some others, received bullets when in actual flight." Pooran and four others were killed and others were severely injured. Instead of being brought to trial for this, the officer-in-charge was decorated by the Government.

What we wanted was a neutral police to keep normal law and order. Words were put into my mouth when I was stated to have said: "We shall organize a police force: it will be known as the People's Police." What I, in fact, said was: "We need a People's Police." This speech was made *after* we had already won the elections with an overwhelming majority, and when I was fully aware that by our new Constitution the police force was not in charge of an elected Minister *but of the Chief Secretary*. The Governor was Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Under these conditions, it was of course impossible to think of organizing a People's Police.

The Minister of Labour is charged in the White Paper with interfering with the police and is reported to have said, "It is nauseating to find that as soon as there is a labour dispute or stoppage of work—no matter how trivial or large—the police intervene . . . Any repetition of the past attitude and conduct by the police will meet with stern action on the part of the elected Ministers."

Ministers, particularly the Minister of Works and the Minister of Labour, did complain in Executive Council about the action of the police in labour disputes. On one occasion at Plantation Lusignan, where the

Inspector of Labour was interrogating some workers, the police were found taking notes and names of the workers. Undoubtedly, these names passed into the hands of the sugar planters. The Minister of Labour rightly felt that this practice should cease.

Another section of the White Paper deals with the alleged danger of violence in British Guiana. I am again misquoted in support of this allegation. Yet the two speeches in question were delivered on May 3rd and March 10th, long before the Governor gave us our portfolios. This was done at the end of May. If these quotations are now considered grave enough to warrant our dismissal, why were we given our portfolios in the first place?

The White Paper also states that—from "reliable sources"—it was established that we planned to set fire to business property and to residences of prominent Europeans and Government officials in Georgetown. This is indeed a major charge and we challenged the Government to arraign us with it before the courts. When asked in the House of Commons why we were not charged, Mr. Oliver Lyttelton disclosed that the "reliable sources" were police agents who had been intimidated. This alleged incendiary plan of ours was one of the few specific charges in the White Paper. It was a major reason for the suspension of the Constitution and dismissal of the ministers. Yet in answer to a question by Mr. Fenner Brockway, M.P. in the House of Commons, it was revealed by Mr. Hopkinson that the alleged plan was "made" on the 7th, three days *after* the Queen signed the Order-in-Court on the 4th. In other words, our "plan to burn down Georgetown" was made, according to the British Government, after counter-measures were taken to prevent it! Needless to say, there has not been one single case of incendiarism in Georgetown.

So great was the "violence" we had "planned", however, that troops had to be landed early one morning in battle formation under the cover of darkness. But the same afternoon when wandering about the market places they were asking the people, "Where is the War?" An inter-colonial cricket match went on as usual. Foreign Correspondents were at a loss. The attitude of most was expressed in the words of the *Daily Herald* correspondent: "I flew into this crisis city of palms and wooden houses on stilts late last night. And this afternoon, 18 hours later, I am still looking for the crisis."

It is true that some leaders of the P.P.P. went to Eastern Europe and attended conferences there. People from Britain, many of whom are non-Communists, also did that. While the P.P.P. is not a Communist Party, it does not question its members' ideologies so long as they remain loyal to the Party's programme.

We did not regard membership of the World Peace Congress as a Communist monopoly. Many non-Communists the world over belong to this organization. As Colonials, we realize that unless new development schemes are embarked upon, our standard of living will continue to be very low. Vast amounts of money are now being spent on armament for war preparations. If only a fraction of this wealth could be devoted to constructive projects in backward territories like British Guiana, significant improvements could quickly change the lives of the people.



And then the White Paper charges us with wanting to set up a one-party Communist police-state. Clearly this is only to draw a red herring across the trail—to raise the bogey of Communism. I have already remarked that the police were under the control of the Chief Secretary—a civil servant appointed by the Secretary-of-State for the Colonies—and that the Governor remained Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

Even if we had had the desire, and were mad enough to think that we could set up a police-state by force—having presumably “subverted the police”—what chance could such a police-state have had, with an unarmed population of less than half a million against the military might of Britain and America?

We could not set up a one-party state by legislation. To do this would have meant banning and proscribing all political parties and the suppression of democratic rights of all individuals and groups opposed to the P.P.P. Under our Constitution, however, the Governor could have vetoed all such repressive laws.

Clearly, from the analysis, the P.P.P. was neither setting up a police-state nor pursuing a Communist policy. Examination of our election manifesto and of the Bills we had sponsored shows that we were introducing no more than very mild reforms.

When Mr. Lyttelton spoke of Communism, what he in fact meant was *any* Government which opposed the extraction and export abroad of profits earned from the sweat and tears of colonial workers.

#### **Our Appeal to Britain**

Many of the things we sought to establish in British Guiana had been long ago enacted in the United Kingdom. But the sugar planters in British Guiana, having enjoyed undisturbed domination, were opposed even to these mild reforms. They feared for their profits.

The issue in British Guiana is not Communism. It is whether or not the people have the right to rule themselves.

Today in British Guiana, in the name of democracy, democracy itself is being destroyed. Force and the threat of bullets have displaced a Government elected by free ballots. British Guiana clearly shows that the British Government will only tolerate in the colonies a Government which it can control, and which is sympathetic to its imperialist point of view.

Assuming that the P.P.P. has Communists within its united front alliance, must the people be told—Yes, you can vote: but you must not vote for the left-wing elements of the P.P.P.?

The issue is clear. Either you have a right to vote or you don't.

Either you have the right to choose your own form of government and rule yourselves, or you don't.

The people of Britain must accept this challenge of British Guiana. Today our constitutional rights are taken away. Tomorrow it may be your turn. If democracy and civilization is to survive you must act now. You must help us to fight for the restoration of our democratic rights.