

The Afro-Guyanese Experience

By Cheddi Jagan and Moses Nagamootoo

In the Caribbean, the mere mention of sugar elicits another word — slavery. The switch from tobacco to sugar as the main crop in the Caribbean ushered in the socio-economic system of slavery. And the slave-trade in the Caribbean meant trade in African slaves, 15 million of whom were shipped across the "Middle Passage" to the so-called "New World" between 1518 and 1807.

This period of early colonial expansion signalled the dawn of the era of capitalist production. Karl Marx wrote of it as "the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins."¹

In the name of wealth and capital accumulation, unspeakable crimes were committed by slave-traders, Africans suffered in many ways — as victims forcibly uprooted from their land of birth, as chattel slaves inhumanly exploited on the plantation, and as Blacks whose culture, features and colour were used as rationalisations to justify the despicable trade in "human cargoes" from the African continent.

The chains of slavery were galling. In *The Black Jacobins*, C. L. R. James refers to the "crack of the whip, the stifled cries and the heavy groans of slaves . . . who saw the sun rise only to curse it for its renewal of their labours and their pains".² On the plantations, slaves were worked like animals, cruelly punished and constantly terrorised. They received the whip with more certainty and regularity than they received food, according to C. L. R. James.³

Slavery was a life from which few really expected to escape. The Guyana experience, as was the case elsewhere in the West Indies, showed a prevailing pattern of a vicious circle of punishment, resistance, escape, capture, punishment. The masters acted in the only way they knew: more cruelty and more punishment; the slaves reacted in the only way open to them: sullenness, non-co-

operation, passive resistance and escape which alternated with sabotage and revolt.

While not every slave was a Spartacus (a rebel slave during the Roman Empire) or even potentially one,⁴ and the system bred many collaborators⁵ (as the imperialist capitalist system did in more recent times), slaves throughout the West Indies rebelled when they could.⁶ Such resistance, Melville Herskovits asserts in his *Myth of the Negro Past*, may be traced as far back as the slave ships.⁷ Michael Craton insists that there is a continuum of slave resistance from the moment of capture in Africa to the overtly bloody Afro-Carib revolts in the West Indies.⁸

If the first skirmishes took the form of White-Black confrontation, the pattern that subsequently unfolded was underlined by class considerations. The fact of the matter is that there was an "antagonistic and irreconcilable relationship" between the two main social classes under slavery — masters and slaves.⁹ One Jamaican slave described that relationship as "the life of a dog"¹⁰ while the Jamaican martyr of the 1831 revolt, Samuel Sharpe, poignantly demonstrated the irreconcilability of the relationship when he defiantly said: "I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery."¹¹

Throughout the West Indies, African slaves shared a popular ideology of freedom sometimes referred to as the politics of slave resistance. The Afro-Guyanese experience — the 1763 Berbice and 1823 Demerara slave revolts — proved Herbert Aptheker, US Black history scholar, correct when he submitted that "resistance, not acquiescence, is the core of history".¹² Our experience could also locate struggles within the context of the inherited tradition of Amerindian resistance.¹³

In some cases, as in Berbice and Haïti, the objective was the total seizure of power and the replacement of the European controlled state by a Black state. Other rebellions like the Maroons of Jamaica and the "Bush Negroes" of Suriname, had a more limited objective: the establishment of autonomous village communities within an overall white-controlled territory.

In the face of great odds, superior forces and arms, our early revolutionaries proved they could not easily be intimidated. Leaders such as Cuffy in Berbice, Quamina in Demerara and Damon in Essequibo laid down their lives in heroic struggles for freedom.

Slavery and apprenticeship could not endure the test

of time. The deep-seated class contradictions and the dynamic processes of society were forces which the various facets of the slave system could not contend with and resolve. And those who would wish to deny the role of internationalism and solidarity in struggle should analyse the impact of the American, French and Haitian revolutions, the selfless campaigns of English humanitarians and White missionaries, etc, on the abolition of slavery, the vicious system which did not proceed beyond the 19th century in the Caribbean.¹⁴

The emancipation which came about by the ending of Apprenticeship was a great historical event. But it did not mean the complete liberation of the slave. The "chains" of domination and exploitation changed forms but were nonetheless exacting.

The ending of apprenticeship in 1838 in the Anglophone countries did not herald an end to slavery in general or to the plantation system in particular. African slavery as a system had embraced the tropical zone of the Brazilian Northeast, the South of the United States and the Caribbean Basin. And the plantation system was based on the large-scale production of a single crop (sugar, cotton, tobacco, etc.) for export to Europe — food for the urban masses and cheap primary products and raw materials for industrialisation and development. This system still required an abundant supply of cheap labour.

The Anglophone plantation owners saw themselves at a disadvantage as emancipation did not come about everywhere at the same time. They had with freed paid labour to compete with slave labour elsewhere in the Americas. In the United States, the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by President Abraham Lincoln only on September 1862 and became effective on 1st January, 1863. In Brazil, emancipation came later in 1888.

The plantocracy attained its objectives of unmitigated exploitation and primitive capital accumulation by various means and stratagems. Above all was the creation of a racist ideology — white superiority and non-white inferiority.

Plantation slavery in the Americas was based on race, caste and class. According to Dr. Norman Girvan, "at the top were the white masters, in the middle the mulattoes, and at the bottom the black slaves . . . As in the case of Indian slavery too, an ideology of racism was generated and systematically applied to legitimise the outright

exploitation of one race by another."¹⁵

Girvan points out that racist ideology was expressed in cultural as well as physical terms:

It was certainly the case that African speech, religion, mannerisms and indeed all institutional forms were systematically denigrated as constituting marks of savagery and cultural inferiority, in order to deprive Black people of a sense of collective worth.¹⁶

The very colour of the African's skin was held to be the first and the lasting badge of his inferiority; as were the characteristics of his mouth, nose and hair texture. The desired consequence of extending the ideology of racism from cultural to physical attributes was to ensure that the African, whatever his degree of success in assimilating white culture, was permanently imprisoned in his status as a slave inasmuch as he was permanently imprisoned in his black skin.¹⁷

Cultural whiteness gave the slave some advantages such as a job as headman or a house slave. The badge of inferiority due to physical attributes was something that Cheddi Jagan experienced as a student at the black Howard University in Washington in 1936-38, long before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

That the abolition of slavery and the ending of apprenticeship was not a revolutionary transformation, but only a change in the basis of exploiting labour was manifestly evident. According to Brazilian sociologist, Florestan Fernandes, in Brazil, "the 'negro' remained almost at the margin of this revolution. He was negatively selected, having to be content with what now came to be known as 'nigger work': unstable or difficult jobs, as miserable as they were underpaid."¹⁸

After emancipation in the United States, the Blacks who migrated to the North found themselves enmeshed in ghettos where they were confined to dirty, unskilled, low-paying and unstable occupations. Today, Blacks are second-class citizens and some of the gains made earlier are being eroded.

In Guyana, as late as the 1940s when a virtual 'colour bar' existed in the civil service — Blacks could not rise beyond a certain point in the administrative/executive ladder, with a few exceptions in the professions. A Junior Civil Service Association agitated for the abolition of the colour bar. A similar bar existed in insurance, banking, mines and plantations.



The fight for democracy and the free vote goes on in 1989. Imagine that! The ruling clique stole these rights by armed force, poll fraud, deceit and false promises. Here Dr. Jagan is seen conversing with the voters after he was brutally manhandled by police gunmen at Haslin gton in 1985. He had gone there to look into reported fraud against Indo-Guyanese voters.

It was against this ethno-cultural racism that Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association developed in the early part of this century. Because of its strong appeal against oppression and exploitation, this Black nationalist movement gained widespread appeal in North and Central America and the Caribbean. It constituted a Pan-Black or more properly a Pan-African struggle against colonialist exploitation and plunder and a call for Pan-African regeneration.

The plantocracy not only used racist ideology for subjugation and exploitation. It also resorted to methods which were intended to undermine the very basis of emancipation and to divide and rule.

Immigrants were brought from Europe and mainly from Asia not only to work for less than what was demanded by the freed ex-slaves, but also to create a surplus labour force in and around the sugar estates. It was expressed that it "... is the East Indian under indenture who fixes the rate of wages rather than the free labourer."¹⁹

The flood of immigrants, in the context of a lack of alternative employment, brought about pressure for work and thus no incentive for improvements on the estates. By 1884, the supply of "free" labour was "so abundant that the market rate fell below the statutory rate for indentured immigrants."²⁰ And what seemed more obnoxious to them was general taxation by customs duties and export levies to finance immigration costs, as well as medical services on the estates, the immigration department and the recruiting Office in Calcutta.

The People's Association, which included 7 out of the 14 members of the Combined Court, reported:

... the race to whose detriment the coolies were being introduced were made to contribute to the cost of a scheme of immigration designed either to supplant the negro or to coerce him into service with the planters at a wage inadequate for his proper maintenance.²¹

The People's Association rightly felt that the charges for immigration, etc, should be a direct charge on the sugar plantations.

At the same time, the Afro-Guyanese were subjected to other restrictions and difficulties. The planters adopted a deliberate policy of denying land to the freed ex-slaves. The People's Association noted that the Land Code of 1839 not only set a high price for land, but also stipulated that

only a minimum of 100 acres of Crown Lands could be acquired. It was only on 14th January 1890 that Crown Lands, which had cost ten dollars per acre, were reduced to one dollar. According to Malcolm Cross: "it was only after the first change in 1890 and the subsequent one of 1898, when the sugar industry was in decline and the battle to retain labour became, for a brief period, of lesser consequence that the planters acquiesced to the possibility of a landed peasantry."²²

"Even then the settlements which could be opened up, and the encouragement given by the government, were almost solely for rice growing — an occupation peculiarly suited to the Indians but one which was regarded as anathema by the blacks."²³

In contrast, the policy in Trinidad was more enlightened. Large tracts of land had been given out for cocoa and cane farming to both freed ex-slaves and immigrants leading not only to the development of an independent peasantry, but also to lessened racial tension as a result of reduced direct competition in the sugar plantations. Trinidadian land settlers did not also face the same problems as their counterparts in British Guiana, whose lands were subject to inundation from the sea and floods and drought.

Nevertheless, the "push" from the plantations was so great that freed ex-slaves made great achievements not only by sacrificing and saving to found their own villages, but they worked co-operatively and initiated the establishment of a system of local government. Of the 60,000 odd Africans and mulattoes then in the colony, about two-thirds had migrated to the villages. By 1851 they had erected 11,152 homes, and the property owned by them was worth nearly £1 million.

The first property bought in November 1839 by 83 former slaves for 30,000 guilders was Plantation Northbrook on the East Coast of Demerara; part of its 500 acres was renamed as the village of Victoria.

In April 1940, 128 Blacks bought plantation New Orange Nassau for \$50,000 and later renamed it Buxton. Other plantations bought — Beterverwagting, Fellowship, Den Amstel, Plaisance, Friendship, Litchfield, Perseverance, Ithaca, Gibraltar, Rose Hall and Liverpool — formed the backbone of the village movement.

Initially, an attempt was made by the ex-slaves to run the abandoned plantations as genuine co-operatives

with the cultivation of provisions for their own consumption and for sale. "When the planter-dominated colonial government adopted laws which made co-operative land tenure illegal, the co-operatives' lands were divided among their members"²⁴ in accordance with the amount of initial investment.

The plantocracy also resorted to various measures which were conducive to racial conflict and were essential for the maintenance of law and order. By conferring political and economic benefits and privileges or imposing burdens selectively and disproportionately on different subordinated ethnic groups, it maintained the status quo; a situation which was to haunt Guyana in the immediate pre- and post-independence period through the divide-and-rule politics of the ruling class.

According to Dennis Bartels: "Again, as with Afro-Guyanese farmers, absence of a class of wealthy Afro-Guyanese merchants was a direct result of planter and colonial government policy which favoured the development of Portuguese and Indo-Guyanese businesses"²⁵ ... The businesses started by Afro-Guyanese and Coloured during the emancipation period were ruined by the planters²⁶ ... Ruling class wholesalers and merchants extended credit to many Portuguese retailers, while withholding credit from Creoles and Coloured"²⁷

The African gang generally had an African as a driver; it was most common for a Chinese to have a Chinese. But the Indian immigrants had an African driver. The Africans were given cane cutting work at 60-85 cents per day, whilst the Indians were relegated to weeding at 25-45 cents a day. Indian immigrants were excluded from jobs such as engineering and pan (sugar) boiling. The technique was employed by the planters of flooding or over-draining the land, so as to destroy the crop of the small holder. This was one way to force the freed slave-turned-peasant back to the plantation.

When land settlements were created for Indian immigrants, in lieu of return passage, beginning with Huis t' Dieren in Essequibo in 1880 and laid out in two-acre plots, the ex-slaves were excluded. This aggravated their sense of frustration and bitterness. Their improved position after emancipation was destroyed by the planters when they "persuaded the local legislature to deny to the African the right of settling on the soil as an agriculturist."²⁸

This was justified on the ground of irresponsibility,

inability and incapacity. The Colonial Office in 1903 agreed with governor Swettenham's views that the Blacks in British Guiana were irresponsible and affirmed that the "underdeveloped estates" could not fall into the "incapable hands" of the blacks.

Racial stereotypes were also created by the ruling class not only to justify further immigration and exploitation, but also to foster attitudes of prejudice among the subordinated racial groups so that conflict instead of co-operation could continue in the plantations.

As regards racial stereotypes, Bartels says: At the same time, ruling class racist ideology allowed for distinctions between different non-white ethnic groups. Many accounts by plantation owners, plantation managers, colonial officials, and Christian missionaries characterised East Indians as (1) industrious and hardworking; (2) thrifty to the point of greed; and (3) lacking in Christian morals. . . . On the other hand Afro-Guyanese were often characterised as (1) physically strong, but lazy, carefree, irresponsible, financially improvident, and intellectually dim; (2) physically repulsive because of their facial features, skin colour, and hair type; and (3) child-like, trusting, and easily misled by more intelligent, unscrupulous people.²⁹

The rapidly racist and deep-seated animosity was also expressed by the famous commentator on the ethnography of Guyana, E. F. Im Thurn, who, when addressing the Royal Colonial Institute in London argued that "... it is all very well to say that a man is a man whether his skin is white or black; but it is certain that the vast majority of West Indian blacks — all but the very few really educated members of the class — are not men but children, great, strong, generally good tempered children, but almost always fickle, and essentially, though from mere thoughtlessness, cruel."³⁰

Ruling class racist ideology and the racial stereotypes it fostered, especially in the context of ruling class power dispensing political and economic benefits and burdens, tended to foster divisions in the various subordinated ethnic groups — the Afro-Guyanese, Indo-Guyanese and the Portuguese. These groups in turn used the ruling class racial stereotypes to strengthen their own distinct social and economic positions, thus maintaining and

strengthening ethnic divisions and conflict and preserving the interests of the ruling class.

But operating side by side with this conflict tendency was another based on working class solidarity against the common enemy, the planters. Especially, during periods of economic crisis, this tendency resulted in unity and concerted industrial and political action against the ruling class.

As early as 1678, African slaves and Carib Indians joined in an insurrection against the Dutch planters in Suriname. In 1847-48, recently emancipated slaves were joined by East Indians and Portuguese indentured plantation workers in strikes for higher wages. In 1904-05 and again in 1924, East Indian plantation labourers joined Afro-Guyanese workers in demonstrations and strikes against the employers and the colonial government. In the 1936-45 period, sugar and bauxite workers were organised by the Man-Power Citizens Association (MPCA).

The Political Affairs Committee (PAC) from 1946 to 1949 linked the struggles of the Indian sugar workers and the Black transport and bauxite workers. And in the 1950-55 period, Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese workers struggled unitedly against the plantocracy under the class-based and scientific-socialist banner of the People's Progressive Party.

In his doctoral thesis, Dennis Bartels pointed out:

"The first general election under the new constitution was to be held in April, 1953. Until the formation of the PPP, most non-white politicians had appealed to voters on the basis of ethnicity, or personal reputation. Few had presented platforms which appealed to class interest, and none had carried their election campaigns to rural areas; particularly to the sugar estates. . . . The PPP changed all this. PPP candidates in the 1953 election came from almost all of the ethnic groups in Guyana (with the possible exception of Amerindians). They appealed to voters on the basis of a pro-working class, nationalistic platform and not on the basis of ethnicity. And they built party organisations in rural areas. In short, the PPP modernised politics in Guyana."

"Although the success of the PPP in forging inter-ethnic unity among workers during this period is well documented, it has not received attention from plural theorists."

Working class unity had been earlier forged in the serious labour disturbance of 1905 as a result of the sugar crisis and the wage reduction of 20-35 per cent between 1894 and 1897 by a combination of rate-cutting and speed-up. Afro-Guyanese workers at Pln. Ruimveldt went on strike and some Indo-Guyanese estate workers joined them. On 2nd December, 1905, police constables opened fire on a predominantly Afro-Guyanese crowd of strikers, wounding some and killing others.³¹

On 31st March, 1924, waterfront workers went on strike for improved wages and working conditions. Support was forth-coming from sugar workers on the East Bank of Demerara. A mixed crowd of nearly 5,000 plantation workers, who were marching to Georgetown to join the urban workers on strike, were stopped at Ruimveldt. Police opened fire, killing 12 and seriously wounding 15, including both Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese.

In the interval between the 1905 and the 1924 upheavals and shootings, working class consciousness developed significantly under the leadership of trade unionist, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, and the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU). Militant leadership was not only provided to the urban working class, but steps were taken also to improve conditions in the sugar estates. Under Critchlow's leadership, the first tentative steps were made to bring about organised urban/rural, African/Indian working class unity.

Indians joined the BGLU and Critchlow was deemed the "Black Crosby", named after the White Immigration Agent General James Crosby, who protested against the abuses of the system of Indian indentureship in British Guiana. The influence of the BGLU and its support led to the election of nationalist leaders to the Combined Court.

The response by the capitalist ruling class to the emancipation struggle of the working people under the leadership of the Afro-Guyanese working class and radical intelligentsia through the Critchlow Movement was brutal. The liberal Constitution inherited from the Dutch was suspended in the late 1920s and a Crown colony type of Constitution imposed with the Governor having absolute powers of certification and veto. At the same time, steps were taken to destabilise the Movement by undermining the working class leadership of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow.

This process was to be repeated in the early 1950s when, after the PPP victory of 1953, the Constitution was suspended, the leadership undermined and the Party split.

In 1953, when the working class was united, the Anglo-American imperialists used ideological anti-communist hysteria to justify the destruction by armed force of the PPP Government. Soon after, by manoeuvring and imposing unequal pressures, burdens and penalties, they engineered a division in the Party ranks in 1955. And later, when racial incitement, strikes, demonstrations and blockade resulted in racial strife and bloodshed, they used ethnic divisions as the excuse for denying independence in 1962-63. The modern-day imperialists had learnt well the divide-and-rule methods of the plantocracy.

To the advocates of the pluralist theory, this observation and critique of K. W. J. Post is pertinent:

If the allegiance to plural sections is at all times constant and overriding, how then do we explain the success of the PPP in bringing together Africans and Indians in 1950-53? The answer is, of course, the common oppression of the masses of both at the hands of the colonial system, something of which Professor Despres might have made far more had he not rejected class as part of his theoretical apparatus Guyanese political development since 1953 has not been determined by the plural society, but by British and U.S. policy. This has been the constant in the situation not the plural society. At every crucial point where the allocation of political power has been involved . . . it has been intervention from outside which has decided the matter. It is remarkable, for example, that Professor Despres has nothing to say about the role in the 1960s of the C.I.A. and private organisations like the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, and only an obscure footnote reference to the American Institute for Free Labour Development (1969: 91).

CARIBBEAN DEVELOPMENTS

There were grass root upheavals for the emancipation of the working people in the late '30s and early '40s — Kola Rienzi and Uriah Butler in Trinidad, Bustamante in Jamaica, Boysie Skinner and Philip Payne in Barbados, Mackintosh and Joshua in St. Vincent, and Critchlow and

Edun in British Guiana. These events were reflective of the socio-economic problems linked to the aftermath of the Great Depression of 1929.

The developments led to the convening of several West Indian Conferences in British Guiana under the leadership of Crichtlow and the BGLU, the call for the forging of a nation through a West Indies Federation with a socialist perspective, and to the formation of the militant anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC).

In the pre-and post-independence period, the struggle for emancipation was influenced by various ideological currents — nationalism, fabianism, democratic-socialism and Marxism-Leninism. Until the late 1940s, these currents played a positive anti-colonial and anti-imperialist role. However, with the advent of the Cold War, negative aspects developed.

The nationalist People's National Movement (PNM) in Trinidad and Tobago aligned itself politically on the Western side and embraced the reformist planning strategy, "neither Puerto Rican nor Cuban", which objectively put it in line with the "partnership" economic model of imperialism. Right-wing, reformist fabianism and democratic-socialism also led objectively to an alignment with imperialism. And in the left, as a result of the division in the World Communist Movement, ideological differences led to confusion and disunity in the ranks of the working class.

The end result was a setback for national liberation, economic emancipation and social progress. Its manifestation was the disbandment of the Caribbean Labour Congress, attacks on the PPP government following British "gunboat diplomacy" in 1953, acceptance of a West Indies Federation on the basis of "collective colonialism", adoption of the pro-imperialist Puerto Rican model of development and a course of dependent capitalism.

These developments led to the growth of a new ruling elite — a non-white bureaucratic and neo-comprador parasitic bourgeoisie — leading to the continuing "development of underdevelopment" and worsening conditions for the dispossessed Black masses. The latter remain as the suppliers of cheap unskilled labour. This situation saw the development of new forms of struggle for emancipation — the Ras Tafari movement, the Black Power movement and others.

The Ras Tafari grass-roots protest movement in the 1950s and 1960s was to Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean what the Garvey movement was to the region in the early part of this century. A significant difference was that while the latter posited mainly white domination, the former was an expression of disillusionment with black and mulatto rule and power.

The Black power movement in the Caribbean also struggled for change. While its counterpart in the USA was chiefly centred around the struggle against second-class status for Blacks and for civil rights, dignity and equality, the Caribbean movement, led by the radical intelligentsia, was more oriented towards the revolutionary change of society. Dr. Walter Rodney's great contribution to this movement was his Marxist-Leninist world outlook and class approach.

Because of differences in outlook and approach, the Pan-African movement, which wanted a united and socialist Africa, Kwame Nkrumah's dream, also faced difficulties. Some, who preached "Caribbean exceptionalism" and advocated a policy of "equidistance from the two super-powers", like George Padmore, one-time political adviser to Ghanaian Prime Minister Nkrumah, saw this development taking place in isolation from the socialist community. Others, however, like Dr. W. E. B. Dubois and Paul Robeson, pioneers in the US civil rights movement, saw a socialist Pan-Africa emerging only in close association with the socialist states.

These differences were exposed in sharp focus in the mid-1970s in relation to support for the revolutionary-democratic MPLA government of Angola. At a crucial OAU meeting, there was an equal division of votes, with "African-socialist" Senegal and "Arab socialist" Egypt lining up with 20 other African states against Angola and on the side of South Africa and the imperialists.

Similarly, in the Caribbean in 1983, the democratic-socialist government of the Barbados Labour Party and other nationalist and Christian-democratic Caribbean governments openly co-operated with the US aggression against Grenada.

In the late 1960s, the ruling Caribbean elites, when confronted with the Black Power Movement had responded: We do not need black power; black people are already in power. But time has demonstrated that "black people in power" has generally meant clientelle power — client

neo-colonialist states, which despite revolutionary, even socialist, rhetoric are fulfilling the broad political, economic, ideological, cultural, military and strategic aims of imperialism.

Jamaica and Grenada have shown that capitalist dependency, in the context of an on-going and deep general, structural and cyclical crisis of world capitalism, only increases under-development which in turn deepens the dependency. Barbados, once regarded as a model of development for the Caribbean, is now faced with grave problems.

That imperialism has no answer for the problems facing the Caribbean peoples is manifested by the new wave of mass upsurge. The puppet New National Party government of Grenada has been split. The US backed Seaga-led Jamaica Labour Party government is tottering; it lost all but one of the 13 local parish elections in 1986 and is faced with electoral defeat at the forthcoming general elections.

Ruling parties in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were defeated disastrously in recent elections. In St. Lucia, the ruling party saw its majority in parliament reduced to one. And despite a popular mandate, the ruling party in Barbados and the coalition in Trinidad are faced, within a very short period, with internal dissension due to a reformist approach and centrist/rightist policies.

As a result of capitalist dependency, underdevelopment, declining living standards, alienation and discontent, large numbers of the Caribbean working people regrettably see salvation in another movement: emigration to North America. Hopelessness must be combatted. The class struggle in all its aspects, political, economic and especially ideological, must be intensified. What is needed is a revolutionary democracy with a socialist-oriented programme.

In the metropolitan countries, a broad-based anti-monopoly coalition must be forged. In the third world, anti-imperialist unity on a regional and national basis is essential for genuine political independence and economic and social emancipation. This means unity of all left and democratic forces. In class terms, it means the forging of a broad multi-class and strata alliance, with the revolutionary-democrats (left-wing of the petty-bourgeois class) and communists (the vanguard of the working class) playing the leading and guiding role.

With growing contradictions not only within the three centres of world capitalism but also between the imperialist and the imperialist-dominated third world states, the prospects for the future are bright.

The objective situation favours revolution. At the subjective level, however, there is a lag. In multi-ethnic societies like Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, it is necessary to fight against racist ideology and racial stereotypes which were created and fostered by the capitalist/colonialist ruling class, and later exploited by self-serving politicians. It must be recognised that whatever our racial origin, we have a common heritage.

Our fore-fathers, regardless of ethnic, religious and cultural differences, watered the sugar cane with their blood, sweat and tears. Little wonder that Dr. Eric Williams in his book *Capitalism and Slavery* had observed: "strange that an article like sugar so sweet and necessary for human existence should have occasioned such crimes and bloodshed".

Fortunately, in Guyana and other multi-ethnic societies, we see a growing working class consciousness from a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself" approach. The grave economic and social crisis and IMF "prescriptions" are creating the objective conditions for racial and working class unity, as at specific periods in the colonial era. Though shot, killed, detained, restricted and imprisoned on countless occasions, our ancestors continued to unite, struggle and sacrifice for the common good.

On this 150th Anniversary of the ending of Apprenticeship and the beginning of Indian Indentureship, the greatest tribute we can pay to our ancestors is to pledge to unite and struggle for complete emancipation, which can only come from a multi-ethnic, broad-based revolutionary democracy. It is imperative for the survival and prosperity of this great nation to forge a *modus Vivendi*, a formula for power-sharing, reflective of the composition and interests of all sections of the Guyanese people. We must return to the 1953 era of racial and working class unity and harmony, and fight for emancipation from modern-day IMF and CBI neo-slavery. Emancipation cannot be complete without the freedom of Nelson Mandela and the total eradication of the detestable apartheid doctrine and all forms of racial discrimination.

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17. Girvan, op. cit. p. 28 cites Beckford, "At first white people had justified slavery on the grounds that Africans were heathens. But when they had been converted to Christianity that justification could no longer stand. And so the theory of the racial inferiority of black people was advanced".
18. Cited in Norman Girvan, op. cit., p. 13.
19. Malcolm Cross, "East Indian-African Relations in Trinidad and Guyana in the late 19th Century", paper prepared for the Conference on Indo-Caribbean History and Culture, 9-11 May 1988 at the University of Warwick, England.
20. Alan H. Adamson, *Sugar without Slaves, the Political Economy of British Guiana, 1838-1904*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press p. 194.
21. Cd 5194, p. 19. Cited in Malcolm Cross, op. cit., p. 26.
22. Malcolm Cross, op. cit., p. 24.
23. *Ibid.* p. 15.
24. Dennis Alan Bartels, "Class Conflict and Racist Ideology in the Formation of Modern Guyanese Society", University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1978, p. 32.
25. *Ibid.* p. 34.
26. *Ibid.* p. 38.
27. *Ibid.* p. 109.

28. Cd 5194, p. 15. — cited in Malcolm Cross, op. cit., p. 24.
29. Dennis A. Bartels, op. cit., p. 44.
30. E. F. Im Thurn, "Notes on British Guiana", Paper read at the Royal Colonial Institute, London, 13 December 1892, pp 7-8.
31. Dennis Bartels, op. cit., p. 155.
32. Cited in Dennis Bartels, op. cit., p. 14.



This kind of slave-like labour still obtains in the sugar industry in 1989! Sugar workers of both races are treated like beasts of burden. They have absolutely no say in managing the industry. In the days of slavery and indentureship, their ancestors had no say either.