

26TH JULY MOVEMENT – CAMAGUEY INDOCTRINATION

by Cheddi Jagan

As every man born by the only fact of birth, he has the right to live. A millionaire's son and a beggar's son have the same right of living. What is the right of living? It is to have the right the right to breathe the air, get warm under the rays of the sun, it is the right to eat, and as all nourishment directly or indirectly forms the earth, every man has a right to a piece of land to nourish himself."

Believe it or not. The above quotation I copied from a huge sign-board at Camaguey Airport. Camaguey is a province in Cuba and it was one of the key sectors of the revolutionary movement. Incidentally, listening to all the propaganda today in the American press about communism in Cuba, one would think that the above quotation is from Lenin or Krushchev. No, it isn't. It is from Henry George, an American.

I spent the whole day in Camaguey province leaving Havana early in the morning. The movement placed at my disposal a brand new, well furnished small twin-engine plane. The flight was nearly two and a half hours before we landed at Camaguey Airport. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to have a good look at the countryside. I could see new roads, new houses and new cultivation areas. A vast swamp is to be reclaimed. The following day I went by car to another province called Matanzas.

All this work is being undertaken by the Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA). In Havana I had an hour and a half interview with the Director and his staff. Later one evening from 9.00 to 10.30 I entered round table discussion with the industrial planning team – economists, technicians, all young and eager from all over Latin America.

I saw huge cooperatives; there were 18 rice cooperatives alone in Camaguey province. Incidentally, the technicians in charge of rice told me that they have found the vector for Hoja Blanca, the white-leaf disease which nearly destroyed the rice crop in Venezuela. They are willing to give us any advice our Department of Agriculture may need.

Some of the cooperatives specialise in tomato, peanut, etc. Many of these cooperatives are producing crops for the first time. These lands were kept idle for the most part in large estates held by big absentee and local landlords. Under the Land Reform Law, land holding is now limited. An individual or a company can no longer hold more than 1,000 acres. The land in excess of the legal limit is being taken over by the INRA, and compensation is paid in interest (4½ percent) bearing bonds maturing in 20 years. The sugar plantations have been broken up and the land in excess of the maximum limit has been distributed among the workers. The intention is to establish about 700 cooperatives with an average holding of about 3,300 acres. The Government plans to separate cane-growing from factory operations.

Formerly the capitalists owned all the factories, and produced about 40 percent of the cane. Now the intention is to limit the capitalist to factory ownership and operation. If he owns land he cannot own the factory. Incidentally, about one-third of the area in each sugar cooperative must be devoted to food crop – rice, tomatoes, peas, etc. – and pasture.

The face of the countryside is being changed. New houses for the workers and farmers are going up everywhere. The Government intends to level out the vast disparity between town and countryside. Havana was the skyscraper show city, one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. But the countryside was still in the feudal age with grass huts.

There is no doubt about it. The Revolutionary Government has the full backing of the people. For the first time the people feel a sense of social justice. I talked to people in all walks of life. Reading the US papers, one will believe that Caracas and Cuba were an arsenal with a reign of terror everywhere. There could be nothing further from the truth. The atmosphere in Cuba is no different from what one experienced in Venezuela or, for that matter, in Guiana.

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