

The Struggle for Venezuelan Independence -- and its Lessons

by **CHEDDI JAGAN** who led the Trade Mission which stayed 4 days in Venezuela

I met Romulo Betancourt and Senor Batalla, Governor of Caracas, and the youthful underground leader, Fabricio Ojeda and Jesus Faria, the trade union leader, and many others.

It was for them and others like them that the Venezuelan people took to the streets. They uprooted the hated dictatorship of Perez Jimenez.

Sr. Betancourt is an old champion of Venezuelan democracy. The greater part of his life since 1929 has been spent in exile.

Jesus Faria, before the dictatorship, was an oil workers' T.U. leader. Eight years of his life were spent in prison, four of them in solitary confinement. Many freedom fighters, he told me, broke under the torture and strain; quite a few went mad.

Fresh Air

The Venezuelan people having thrown off the Jimenez dictatorship are now breathing the fresh air of independence. For 10 long years they endured this hated dictatorship.

In return for imperialist support—it is openly admitted that

the oil interests conspired in the overthrow of the Betancourt-Callegos government in 1948—the dictator Jimenez strangled the working class, trade union movement, threw their leaders in jail, built monuments and skyscrapers to impress foreign visitors while the mass of the people languished in poverty.

Over the past two years there were various counter revolutionary attempts to overthrow the democratic regime. All these attempts by military remnants of the previous dictatorial regime met with failure. The people came out in the streets and supported the popular regime of Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal.

General Agreement

At the last elections the popular party, Accion Democratica, was returned at the head of the polls.

Although the four leading parties contested the elections there was general agreement in their broad aims to defend the revolution and preserve freedom of the press and democratic liberties.

Accion Democratica, the party led by the present President Senor Ro-

mulo Betancourt, won most of its support in the countryside, Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, with one-fifth of the country's population, was behind the second largest party, the URD, which backed Larrazabal.

Coalition

The present Government is a coalition government of three main parties—the AD, URD, and Copel. The Communist Party which holds the smallest number of seats in the National Assembly is out of the Government.

Those in Guiana who say that we cannot have a coalition government of the main parties should carefully note the situation in Venezuela.

All the political parties in Venezuela are strongly anti-imperialist. The people of Venezuela are very conscious of the imperialist distortion of their economy. Ninety percent of the national income comes from oil, but oil employs only about 2% of the people.

Poverty

In spite of the spectacular growth and glitter of Caracas there is great poverty in the countryside. Most of the leaders I have spoken to are fully conscious of this, and are determined to correct the imbalance in the economy, to foster industry and agriculture.

At the moment, the Government is seeking to revise tariffs to protect local industries. Venezuelan industries, whatever they are, are highly protected.

But there are various objections to industrial development. The U.S.A. is the 'most favoured nation' with Venezuela. This means that for a wide range of goods, Venezuela must alter, thus raise her tariffs to protect her industries. This is a cause for dissatisfaction and discontent.

Dissatisfaction

Another reason for dissatisfaction is the recent decision to site the newly founded Inter-American Bank in Washington instead of Venezuela. Apparently, in the first ballot, Venezuela was in the lead, but she lost in subsequent ballots.

It would appear that imperialist forces which supported the Jimenez dictatorship are busy trying to overturn the present democratic regime. Military counter-revolutionary attempts are constantly being made. Side by side, the imperialist forces are using economic pressure on the Government.

At first, import of oil was curtailed. Now prices have been slashed. This will mean a loss of nearly 600 million bolivars (2 bolivars equal \$ B.W.I.)

Lessons

Venezuela offers many lessons to the Guianese people. It teaches us to beware of imperialist, foreign money or capital. The Venezuelan people and their political leaders are strongly anti-imperialist not for emotional

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but for sound theoretical and practical reasons. They have experienced over a number of years the reactionary role played by monopoly foreign capital, the support of dictatorships, and the denial of trade union and other basic human rights.

enough. They fight with powerful weapons on every front:

Like Venezuela, we must again as in the days prior to 1953 forge a powerful anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, democratic front.

Powerful Unity

Venezuela also teaches us that the way to fight imperialism is to forge a powerful unity of the major political parties of the country. That is why the PPP has always—before and after the election -- advocated a united front, coalition government

Our enemies have always babbled about a parliamentary opposition. What they fail to remember is that what is good for England is not necessarily the best for Guiana. Great Britain is not suffering under the heels of colonialism. The colonialists imperialists are opposition

BRIGHTON-KILTEARN

The Brighton-Kiltearn Group on the Corentyne Coast held its elections on Sunday, April 12. Those elected were:

Chairman: Thomas Sinclair
Vice-Chairman: Ronald Cummings

Secretary: Robert Bowling
Asst. Sec: Edwin Rose

Treasurer: Maria Drepaul
Committee Members: J. duban Scmrah, Benjamin Kidaroo, Richard Durga, Kathleen Pompey, Kathleen Kargie, Lailian Rago.

Joseph Drepaul performed the duties of Returning Officer.

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