

IS GUYANA TO BE ANOTHER VIETNAM

- by CHEDDI JAGAN

The United States of America is today at the crossroads. Among a broad cross-section of its citizens, there is an agonizing reappraisal. Many question and challenge the basis of US foreign policy especially as it unfolds in Vietnam - crimes against Vietnamese humanity and a great deal of personal loss and suffering for the American people.

It is my purpose to remind Americans of what is being done in their name in Guyana, to make them aware that step by step Guyana is being transformed into a dictatorship by a similar policy which has resulted in such tragedy in Vietnam.

In Guyana, as in Vietnam, United States involvement started out under the administration of the late President J.F. Kennedy. At first, there appeared to be goodwill towards us. This was expressed in refutation of charges by a former editor of Izvestia of U.S. interference and subversion abroad. President Kennedy in early 1962 declared:

"..... the United States supports the idea that every people should have the right to make a free choice of the kind of government they want. Mr. Jagan who was recently elected Prime Minister in British Guiana, is a Marxist, but the United States doesn't object because that choice was made by honest election, which he won".

But soon after, the Kennedy administration launched a three-pronged attack against my government. This included:

- 1) Diplomatic pressure on the British government to withhold independence and change our electoral system.
- 2) Diplomatic pressure on the Venezuelan government to renew a long-dormant claim to two-thirds of our territory.
- 3) CIA-fomented demonstrations, strikes, riots, airline and shipping blockade aimed at bringing down the PPF government and providing the British government with excuses for denying independence to Guyana under the PPP government.

These subversive moves have been documented, particularly by the New York Times and the London Sunday Times. Journalist Drew Pearson exposed the special trip Kennedy made to London in mid-1963 to persuade the then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan not to permit British Guiana to go forward to independence. *the Action,*

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., one of Kennedy's aides, wrote in his book A Thousand Days that, after meeting L.F.S. Burnham in Washington in May 1962, he advised Kennedy that the way to remove from the government my party, which had won three successive elections, was to change our traditional first-past-the-post district electoral system to that of proportional representation, what Harold Wilson when in opposition called a "fiddled constitutional arrangement", but when in office failed to correct "Thus far", continued Schlesinger, "our policy had been based on the assumption that Forbes Burnham was as the British described him an opportunist, racist and demagogue, intent only on personal power".

Mr. Schlesinger went on: "the State Department at first thought we should make a try (to work with me - Cheddi Jagan) - then Rusk personally reversed this policy in a stiff letter to the British early in 1962".

Why did Kennedy go back on his pronouncement on Guyana? According to Schlesinger, "the President went on to express doubt whether Jagan would be able to sustain his position as parliamentary democrat.

'I have a feeling', he said, 'that in a couple of years he will find ways to suspend his constitutional provisions and will cut his opposition off at the knees .... Parliamentary democracy is going to be damn difficult in a country at this stage of development. With all the political jockeying and all the racial tensions, it's going to be almost impossible for Jagan to concentrate the energies of his country on development through a parliamentary system'.

It would seem that the aim of the United States is the attainment of economic development and social progress, through a parliamentary democracy.

What is the record of the US-backed, Burnham-led, coalition government?

The puppet government has brought the country to near-bankruptcy. And step by step a neo-fascist dictatorship is being established.

### BANKRUPTCY

Instead of progressing, Guyana is retrogressing. Agriculture in a predominantly agricultural country is in decline. Industry, with the exception of the foreign-owned extractive bauxite industry, is virtually at a standstill.

The country is heavily in debt, short-term and long-term. A credit balance at the end of the PPP term of office in 1964 has been turned into a growing budgetary deficit. Increasing short-term loans from the banking system have led to a credit squeeze with high interest rates and to deficit financing.

The balance-of-payments position has moved from a surplus to a deficit, necessitating standby credit from the International Monetary Fund to help maintain the external value of the Guyana dollar. And tied as Guyana is to imperialism, it was forced to devalue her currency with the devaluation of the British pound.

Besides, fiscal, trade, economic and foreign policies have been tailored to suit Washington. An American is Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister. The first Governor of the Central Bank of Guyana was a West German.

The Guyana government voted against the seating of People's China at the United Nations; and has refused to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. There has been a break on trade with Cuba. And severe restrictions have been placed on imports from other socialist countries, although the economic advantages, including lower prices, are obvious.

Fiscal policies have resulted in a crushing burden on the poor while over-generous tax, mining and other concessions have been made to the foreign monopolies.

Meanwhile, mass poverty grows and spreads with rising unemployment, coupled with a policy of discrimination in employment, of wasteful public expenditure, of nepotism and corruption. The former Lord Mayor of Georgetown (the capital), a government appointee, in a broadcast in May 1967 cried out against a new elite creating "a new, larger area of snobbery" and against bribery which "is all over the place and is fast becoming a national industry..... the harm done in any situation in which bribery, corruption, nepotism and favouritism assume national proportions and is a way of life from top down, can never be calculated".

Commenting on the growing disillusion, dissatisfaction and frustration columnist "Lucian", a strong government supporter, writing in the Sunday Graphic of July 16, 1967, said:

"Many people - Guyanese and non-Guyanese are disgusted with the present state of affairs

in this country. Some are packing up to leave out of sheer frustration, while others are dejected from unbearable disgust".

Frustration and dissatisfaction are leading to increasing militancy on the one hand and to anti-social tendencies on the other. During the last 3 years, Guyana has experienced a record-breaking number of strikes - 146 in 1965, 172 in 1966 and over 120 in 1967. Violence, crime and juvenile delinquency are on the increase.

And there is every indication that the situation will further deteriorate. Apart from wasteful expenditure, the burden of debt repayment is falling heavily on the Guyanese masses. For three successive years, indirect taxation has been imposed and direct (capital) taxes drastically reduced. The tax load in the first three years of the 7-year Plan is already more than 60 per cent of what was originally estimated to be levied for the entire period.

Debt charges already amount to 16 per cent of budgeted expenditure. This percentage would have been higher had it not been for a moratorium on some loans provided by the United States and Great Britain. It is likely that in the not-too-distant future debt payments will approximate the amounts received from abroad as loans and grants.

As the budget position worsens, the government will impose additional taxation and/or cut the already pruned social services.

#### RIGHTIST DICTATORSHIP

In the face of growing dissatisfaction, discontent, and militancy, the coalition government is preparing to muzzle the working class and to rig the general election, due to be held not later than the spring of 1968.

An anti-strike bill has been introduced in the National Assembly to make provision for compulsory arbitration.

Already enacted is the National Security Act, even more draconic than the US National Security Act of 1953. It gives the government the power without trial to restrict or detain any Guyanese for an indefinite period.

In February 1968, the government refused to issue passports to five Guyanese who were proceeding abroad on scholarships.

From February to June 1968, the biggest attempt at fraud will be mounted. A national Register of all Guyanese 14 years and over is being compiled, out of which will come the electoral roll of persons aged 21 and over.

In the compilation of this register, the Constitutionally provided Elections Commission, made up of a chairman appointed by the Prime Minister and one nominee each of the three political parties, is being completely by-passed. The operational headquarters is under tight security and police guard. And the whole machinery of hand-picked appointees is under the control of the Minister of Home Affairs. Supervising the registration is Shoup Registration System International, which according to Paul L. Montgomery in the New York Times (December 17, 1967), "has previously performed national registration tabulations in Trinidad, Jamaica and Venezuela. D.E. McFeely, the concern's resident manager, said in an interview that he also (understood) that the company had helped with registration last year in South Vietnam".

The registration officers are armed with a great deal of discretion which will be used to advantage for the government. In the case of ~~our~~ our supporters, young persons of voting age can be classified below 21 if they do not have tangible proof. For government supporters, on the other hand, manipulation can permit persons below 21 to be classified as voters.

The government also proposes to register Guyanese resident abroad, estimated to be about 42,000 persons. This will make Guyana probably the

first country in the world to adopt this procedure.

Clearly, the coalition government hopes to make up the loss of its support (The People's National Congress won 40.9% and the United Force 12% of the votes at the December 1964 general election) at home by votes obtained by fraud abroad.

Another possibility of fraud will be multiple registration (a person registering in more than one place) and multiple voting, which is facilitated by the right to vote by proxies.

During the 1964 elections, my party, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) sharply criticized the Governor, Sir Richard Luyt, for enlarging the scope for voting by proxy. Although we polled 46% of the total votes, we secured only 8.6% of the 7,000 odd proxy votes. This was no doubt the reason why the Commonwealth Team of Observers on the Election commented that "one administrative provision which seemed open to manipulation was the proxy vote... we feel it is our duty to point out that the proxy system is liable to abuse".

Sir Richard Luyt's powers are now assumed by the PNC Minister of Home Affairs and Shoup International.

Is Shoup International a CIA front? The New York Times of December 17, 1967, wrote:

"The CIA had no comment on the assertion that the Shoup concern is a front."

Whether Shoup is a CIA-front or not, one thing must be taken for granted. In pursuit of its foreign economic policies based on the Truman Doctrine, now the Johnson Doctrine, the US government, having installed the puppet coalition government by force and fraud will not hesitate to use electoral fraud to maintain its puppets in office.

Meanwhile, top-ranking US politicians and administrators will continue hypocritically to moralize, to proclaim their beliefs in freedom, democracy and the rule of law. This hypocrisy - saying one thing and doing the opposite - has reached the point of deep crisis in respect of US intervention in Vietnam. Under the flimsy excuse of defending freedom and democracy, the US has violated the Geneva Agreements, and is committing genocide in its intervention to prop up a government which cannot be propped up by its own people.

While US presidents talk about parliamentary democracy, their policies and support are heading Guyana towards a right-wing Latin American type of dictatorship. Arthur Sutton, a US citizen sees Guyana as a potential Haiti. Writing in the Frontier (January 1965), he said:

"Our troubles in Vietnam stem, in part, from our efforts to implement policies not particularly supported by the masses. Our troubles in Guyana, where we are attempting the same strategy, are just beginning. They will be equally as perplexing and proportionately as expensive as our Southeast Asian adventure and our ultimate success is just as unlikely."

Guyana, has, unfortunately the potential to become another Haiti. Is it the goal of our present policy? Continued chaos in the hemisphere benefits on one but our enemies, and Guyana, thanks to our inept actions, is poised on the brink of national suicide".

After this was written, the Guyana Evening Post, a strong backer of the neo-fascist United Force, replied: "The other answer is not easy; it is removing from the scene the Jagans and the Suttons". On February 5, 1966, a columnist, the late Percy Armstrong, of the same newspaper called for preventive detention, which was provided for in the National Security Act of 1966.

All US citizens must now seriously oppose their government's foreign policy, which has made their country completely amoral. Gone is the high

purpose that inspired it nearly 200 years ago.

Then, the United States preached about "unalienable rights", and governments "deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed". Now it has arrogated to itself the right of intervention ostensibly in defence of freedom and democracy, but in reality for the protection of vested interests. The ballot box is being rigged. And when rigging cannot suffice, bullets replace ballots.

The American people have a manifest duty to call the war-mongers, the war-makers and the war-profiters to order, to return to the spirit of 1775. Then, Americans, as colonials of Britain, fought a just revolutionary war for the right of self-determination. Today it behoves all decent Americans to support the right to self-determination of all peoples, be they black, brown, yellow or white, in all countries - ~~Cuba~~, Vietnam, Greece and elsewhere. They could do no better than follow the lead of General David M. Shoup, who recently bluntly asserted: "I believe that if we had and would keep our dirty, bloody dollar-crooked, fingers out of the business of these nations so full of depressed exploited people, they will arrive at a solution of their own".

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre