

DISCRIMINATION AND CORRUPTION

AN ADDRESS

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at Symposium at University of Guyana.

In any discussion on discrimination and corruption, it is necessary to take a comprehensive view including consideration of cause and cure. As regards cause, it is not enough merely to point out kinds of discrimination and corruption and to cite examples. To do so would be to take a partial, superficial view in the same way as one can speak about crime and prostitution without relating their relevance and incidence to the social milieu, to factors such as unemployment and poverty. One must try to get to the root cause so as to find an effective remedy.

That there are corruption and discrimination, no one can deny. It has reached such an alarming stage that the government has been forced to take some action, inadequate though it is.

There is discrimination in employment practices on political grounds. In the Guyanese context, this assumes a racial form. Documenting this is a memorandum compiled by the People's Progressive Party concerning the upper echelons of the Public Service. In it are cited cases confirming that the Public Service and Police Service Commissions have become instruments of the Executive will, a rubber-stamp of the Prime Minister's office. As long ago as 1967, the Civil Service Commission expressed grave dissatisfaction with several appointments made by the PSC, some of which were "most questionable and seriously disrupted the Association's confidence in the integrity of the PSC". In a letter, it appealed to the Trades Union Council to "intercede before its too late".

The then president of the Police Federation, Sergeant Joe Braz, giving evidence before the Collins Commission on July 27, 1968, charged that favouritism was rampant in the promotion system in the Police Force. He declared:

"The merit principle is seldom applied. Many men have belittled and degraded themselves in order to find favour with an officer in the hope that they would be recommended for promotion . . . There have even been cases where men who have been before the court on charges touching on their integrity and honesty, have been favoured when neither characteristic could recommend them".

The treatment meted out to students who graduated in socialist countries illustrates the subservience of the PSC. There is, for instance, the case of Dr. Motilal, a Guyanese Tuberculosis Specialist. He was refused employment even though South Koreans and other foreigners man our service and there is need for such a Specialist. The Prime Minister had made it clear that persons who had gone on PPP scholarships to the socialist countries would not be given employment and the PSC subserviently toed that line.

In the lower echelons of the government service, recruitment for employment is done not at the Employment Exchange but at Congress Place, the PNC headquarters. In the rural areas, those given employment by the Employment Exchange must first be screened and cleared by PNC activists.

CORRUPTION

Corruption takes various forms. There is the misuse of public funds. We have been told of unvouched for expenditure for the Independence Celebrations which increased from \$ $\frac{3}{4}$ to \$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ million. Later, the Director of Audit disclosed that \$ $19\frac{1}{2}$ million of expenditure in 1967 was not vouched for.

In 1967, Peter D'Aguiar as Minister for Finance, questioned the illegal and unvouched for expenditure of \$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ million on the East Coast, Demerara road. He called for the dismissal of the UF Minister of Works and Hydraulics, who however, was accommodated by the Prime Minister immediately as Chairman of the Telecommunications Board and later as Minister of Communications.

In the circumstances, the Director of Audit had to go in the same way as the United Force was forced out of the government from the strategic Ministry of Finance. Within this same context must be seen the non-functioning of the Public Accounts Committee.

Strict Tender Board procedures set out during the PPP government are also observed in the breach. This explains why Greenland Co-Operative Society can get so many government contracts. Small truck owners who previously secured direct employment with the Ministry of Works and Hydraulics now have to pay \$ 2 per ton load to Greenland, which has been given the government trucking contracts. The Guyana Marketing Corporation which is subsidized by the public and which has a 25-cents per bag distribution contract with the local flour mill, sub-contracts to Greenland Co-Operative Society for, it is understood, 20 cents per bag. Greenland also got the \$ ½ million contract for the erection of the NIS building.

There is not only the misuse of public funds. Also prevalent is the mis-appropriation of public property and misuse of government personnel.

Bribery has become a national industry. The Archbishop Dr. Alan Knight rightly said in December 1969 that with \$ 5,000 and less, one can get almost anything done in Guyana including the disappearance of files, the reduction of income tax, etc. At the lower levels, the bribe is the means for obtaining a job, a piece of land, a passport, a drivers' licence, a motor vehicle fitness certificate. So corrupt has become the national moral fibre that the credo of the small man has become: "if them big boys can tief, wha wrong wit me".

Existing side by side with discrimination and corruption in the public sector are discrimination and corruption in the private sector. The securing of employment and the holding of the job often depends on the employees being paid less than prescribed by law or he bargained for. In the case of female employees, in many instances there must be acquiescence in the selling of their bodies.

But above all, there is political corruption. Guyana's electoral system was changed by imperialism, not because of principle, but expediency - to get rid of the anti-imperialist PPP government. The electoral process is so rigged with padded voters lists, proxy-voting, overseas voting and tampering of ballot boxes that even the imperialists threw up their hands in horror with their half-hour Granada World in Action TV films, "The Trail of the Vanishing Voters" and "The Making of a Prime Minister". Political activists and even members of the National Assembly are persuaded through harassment and corrupt practices to cross sides not on the basis of ideological persuasion and conviction but opportunism.

Discrimination and corruption must therefore be seen as part and parcel of the political process in the defense of an outmoded social system. The political system, neo-colonialism, which maintains an archaic and anti-human economic system, capitalism-imperialism, is "corrupt", not merely because the individuals who wield political power line their pockets, but because it sustains and maintains a system which has outlived its usefulness and which acts as a brake on further progress and the best interest of the masses of the people. Capitalism-imperialism has become irrelevant in our era just as slavery and feudalism became outmoded in previous eras and had to be replaced for the sake of human progress.

Clearly, tinkering with the system and asking the Ombudsman to investigate will not suffice. The malaise is much more deep-seated. If the curse of corruption and discrimination is to be eradicated, a concentrated drive must be made to bring an end to the system of capitalism-imperialism and neocolonialist rule which sustains and props it. Revolution, not reform, is urgently necessary. To this end, I propose:

- 1) The struggle for the democratization of our society and the real involvement and participation of the people at all levels of government and administration.

Only with the full exercise of civil liberties and truly representative government and institutions and participatory democracy can there begin the process for eradication of discrimination and corruption. In the Guyanese context, this must mean:

- (a) free and fair elections which must involve the impartial conduct of elections, the compilation of new voters lists, the ending of proxy and overseas votes and the counting of ballot papers at the poll where the ballots were cast;
 - (b) the repeal of the National Security Act providing for arrest and detention without trial;
 - (c) the repeal of the Order empowering the government to prevent Guyanese from leaving the country;
 - (d) the fight to couple union recognition with the freedom of trade union association;
 - (e) the defeat of the proposed anti-strike measure, the Trades Disputes Bill;
 - (f) the removal of restrictions against peaceful demonstrations and picketing.
- 2) Fair Employment Practices legislation with penalties for abuse and greater statutory powers to the Ombudsman;
 - 3) A national anti-corruption committee and regional sub-committees with statutory powers to serve as watchdogs of the national interest.

Some cynics and liberals are wont to quote Lord Acton's famous aphorism that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". While this is true in one respect, it is a dangerous half-truth. We make a distinction between people's power or working-class power which we support, and capitalist-imperialist and neocolonialist power which we reject. For the latter, absolute power is synonymous with bureaucratic dictatorial rule, fraud, racism and corruption and their twin "brother", inefficiency. People's power on the other hand guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology eradicate these evils through the expropriation of the expropriators and by the building of a new society free from the exploitation of man by man.