

**TRADE UNION MOVEMENT
AT THE CROSSROADS**
by Observer

Guyana was the venue of the recently-concluded Regional Trade Union Conference/Symposium. Sponsors were the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the American Institute of Free Labor Development (AIFLD). The theme was: "The Caribbean Labour Movement after 70 years."

At the opening ceremony, President Cheddi Jagan delivered the keynote address. Was Dr Jagan's invitation to participate at this gathering a mere formality, as Head-of-State? Or does it portend a new awakening and a new beginning?

Times were when things were different. In the 1930s and 1940s before the cold war in 1947, the labour movement played a dynamic and progressive role in the Caribbean, North America and Europe.

The Guyana Labour Union and the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC) with trade unions and political parties as affiliates, led the militant struggle for independence and a federated West Indies with dominion status.

In the United States, the Political Action Committee (PAC) of the aggressive Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) worked closely with President F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal administration, which played a positive progressive role at home and overseas. A Works Programme during the 1930s Great Depression ensured jobs for the unemployed. And Roosevelt disagreed with Winston Churchill about the Atlantic Charter (1941) -- the latter wanted it to apply only to the Atlantic states in Europe, occupied by Hitler's storm troopers; the former wanted it to apply also to the colonies

fighting for freedom. Roosevelt also acted as a mediator between Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin during World War II.

The situation changed after the death of Roosevelt just before the end of the war. In 1947, when the Cold War was officially launched, Harry Truman, who had succeeded Roosevelt as President, formed an alliance with Churchill against Stalin and the socialist/communist bloc.

The US trade union movement (AFL-CIO), formed by a merger between the CIO and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a traditional supporter of the Democratic Party, continued to support the Truman administration. This caused the American labour movement to be aligned on the same side with the CIA in the destabilisation and overthrow of several democratically-elected governments in Guatemala, Iran, British Guiana and elsewhere.

CONSPIRACY

In British Guiana, the overthrow of the PPP government in 1964 was due to Anglo American conspiracy, CIA subversion and support for the political opposition parties, the People's National Congress (PNC) and the United Force (UF), and the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC).

Neil Sheehan, in a special article in the *New York Times* of February 22, 1967, "CIA is Linked to Strikes That Helped Oust Jagan," documented the CIA operation in Guyana. Soon after on April 16, the Insight Team, in a story in the *Sunday Times*, "How the CIA got rid of Jagan," wrote: "As coups go, it was not expensive: over five years the CIA paid out something over £250,000. For the colony, British Guiana, the result was about 170 dead, untold hundreds wounded, roughly £10 million-worth of damage to the economy and a legacy of racial bitterness."

The CIA's William Doherty Jr. and William McCabe worked through the American Federation of State, County and Municipal employees, the Public Services International (PSI) and the Gotham Foundation, a conduit for the channeling of CIA money.

The GTUC used the National Labour Relations Bill (NLRB) as an excuse for the 80-days strike and strife in 1963. L.F.S. Burnham, who had supported the NLRB in 1953 said in 1963 that it was not the causa (cause) but the casus (occasion) of the war against the PPP government and the people.

On April 23, the Insight Team in another story, "**Macmillan, Sandys backed CIA's anti-Jagan plot,**" implicated Harold Macmillan, former Prime Minister; Duncan Sandys, former Commonwealth and Colonial Secretary; two top security men in Britain and a number of British officials in Guyana, no doubt the Governor, the Commissioner of Police and the Chief Security Officer.

It stated that "not all the British officials on the spot were happy with what the Americans were doing ...(with)such massive manipulation of the local political scene. This feeling was strengthened by the fact that the CIA's efforts were worsening the colony's already severe racial difficulties: the Africans supported Burnham and the Indians supported Jagan, and tension between the two racial groups grew as the CIA levered the two sides further apart. (Eventually, this broke out in bloodshed.)"

The story also asserted that "the CIA were operating under consular cover in Guyana."

British complicity explains why the police and armed forces did not give full and firm support to the PPP government; why the PNC terrorist organisation was not smashed; and why the security's "Research Paper on the PNC Terrorist

Organisation” was withheld from the PPP Government before the 1963 Independence Conference, and its possession was made by the Governor a criminal offence, just prior to the 1964 election.

In 1964, even the British Labour Government was implicated. That is why the British government is now refusing to release official documents under the 30-year rule.

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

The Cold War has been traumatic not only for Guyana, but the whole Caribbean region. The labour movement became an instrument of counter-revolution, not liberation. This was the result of Cold War imperatives, which caused the demise of the militant Caribbean Labour Congress, (CLC) and its replacement by the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL).

This outcome came on the heels of the split in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), formed by trade unions of both East and West in Paris at the end of the war in 1945. Caribbean trade union leaders had participated in the formation of the WFTU.

The roots of the split in the WFTU and the formation of the ICFTU was the war in Malaya – a war waged by the British Labour government, but opposed by the WFTU which supported the liberation fighters. This posed a real dilemma for the British Trades Union Congress, which was a pillar of the Labour government and a founding member of the WFTU.

The British TUC’s way out of the dilemma was to cause a breakaway from the WFTU and the formation of the ICFTU in 1949.

This in turn caused a crisis in the Caribbean Labour movement, which had been traditionally linked to the British labour movement -- the TUC and the Labour Party.

MANIPULATION

In Jamaica, the People's National Party (PNP) demanded the disaffiliation of the Jamaica TUC from the WFTU. Ken Hill, president of the TUC, refused but later agreed only on condition that the TUC was not forced to affiliate with the ICFTU. This had dire consequences -- the expulsion of Ken Hill and three other leaders (the 4 H's) from the PNP; the formation of a rival PNP-controlled union, the National Workers Union; the disbandment a year later in 1951 of the Caribbean Labour Congress.

A last minute attempt was made to save the CLC. Cheddi Jagan, Richard Hart from Jamaica, John Rojas, then president of the Oil Field Workers Union and John La Rose of the Independence Party of Trinidad and Tobago met the late Sir Grantley Adams and his now-deceased principal lieutenant in Barbados to discuss the future of the CLC. Sir Grantley was then the Head of CADORIT, the Caribbean arm of the ICFTU.

It was put to Sir Grantley that everything should be done to save the CLC which had been mooted for disbandment. If affiliation to WFTU was causing the disruption in the CLC which had as affiliates political parties and trade unions, it was suggested to remove the trade unions from the CLC and leave it as an organisation representative of only political parties, and to organise the trade unions in a separate Caribbean Congress of Labour which would be affiliated neither to the WFTU nor the ICFTU. Richard Hart had brought a message from WFTU representative Jamaican Ferdinand Smith, who had been expelled from the United States during the McCarthyite red witch-hunt, that with such a reorganisation, he would propose

to the WFTU that aid should be given to the CCL.

These compromises and admirable suggestions were not accepted by Sir Grantley. The CLC was disbanded and the now existing CCL was formed with affiliation to ICFTU and its Latin American arm ORIT.

DISASTER

The disbandment of the CLC was a great set-back to progressive/revolutionary movement in the Caribbean. The liberation struggle was compromised. The principal Caribbean Leaders in Barbados and Jamaica praised the British Government for the forcible removal of the PPP government and the suspension of the government in 1953. The West Indian Federation, formed in 1958, was constituted as a glorified crown colony with colonial status, instead of dominion status and internal self-government for each unit territory, as had been agreed by the CLC. The weak federal structure without powers of taxation and the subsequent squabbling between Barbados and Jamaica led to the collapse of the Federation in 1962.

And, there was the boomerang in Jamaica against the PNP government led by Michael Manley, which had decreed a bauxite export levy in 1974 that had increased revenues by 600 per cent. His government was finally destabilised in 1980. No real solidarity by the emasculated CLC was forthcoming to Manley's government or to the many other victims in the Caribbean.

In this period of globalization and liberalisation and structural adjustment with privatisation, devaluation and wage freeze, which cumulatively is creating increased unemployment, poverty and social and family disintegration, the CLC needs to make a serious assessment of the global and regional situation. It must think globally and act independently in the region in the interest of the working people.