

U.S. On Trial In Guiana (1964)

By Cheddi Jagan

How sincere is the West, particularly the United States on its pronouncements about democracy and freedom? Is the U.S. sincerely interested in world peace? Those who have, followed events in my small country have expressed grave reservations.

In early 1962, after his interview with the Editor of 'Izvestia' President Kennedy attacked the communists for subversion and condemned Dr. Fidel Castro for denying freedom and not holding elections. In the same interview he said: "... 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."

Despite these oft-expressed sentiments, the United States has twice, in a little more than a decade, sabotaged democracy in British Guiana. Somehow deeds do not square up with words.

In 1953, my popularly elected Government became one of the early victims of the Cold War. Since 1962 U.S. agencies and top-ranking officials, by words and deeds, deliberately worked to remove my Government from office. President Kennedy, according to U.S. columnist Drew Pearson put pressure on the British Government to withhold Independence. A top-ranking State Department official, Mr. William Tyler, speaking before a Congressional sub-Committee, said that the U.S. Government was out of sympathy with my Government and would like to see it out of office. Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, was reported to have urged the Macmillan Government to suspend our constitution or to hold a referendum on a new system of voting demanded by the opposition.

The imposition of proportional representation, deemed by Mr. Harold Wilson in July 1964, when, he was Leader of the Opposition, as a "fiddled constitutional arrangement", led to the removal of my party from the Government, nearly a year before the expiry of my constitutional term of office. The December 7 elections, conducted by the British Government with the aid of a hostile local administrative machine, were far from free and fair. Electoral procedures and irregularities aimed at helping the opposition were indulged in. U.S. money, advisers and propagandists poured in. Yet my party, the People's Progressive Party, topped the polls with 46% of the votes, increased its total by 3.3% as compared with a drop of .4% for the People's National Congress (P.N.C.) and 4% for the United Force (U. F.).

The election results were a clear indication of a vote of confidence in my party and Government. Despite this, the British Labour Government amended the constitution to force my Government out of office and to install the P.N.C., which polled only 40% of the votes. This procedure was in marked contrast with recent events in Canada, Venezuela and the United Kingdom.

In the recent Venezuelan election, the Accion Democratica, in spite of the fact that its total percentage of votes dropped from 49% in 1958 to 32% in 1964, formed the Government. Its poll was the highest for any single party.

In Canada, Prime Minister Lester Pearson's Liberal Party failed to get an absolute majority. Yet it formed a minority Government, having won the largest number of seats for any single party.

In the United Kingdom, the Labour Government was formed in spite of the fact that the Labour Party polled only 44% of the total vote.

It would appear that yardstick principles and conventions applied elsewhere are not to be applicable to this colonial outpost on the South American inland. Western democracy is not for export here. In 1962, the late President Kennedy could write President Betancourt and say that "*the preservation and strengthening of freely effected constitutional Government is the aspiration of all the people of the Americas*" and give support to his regime. But in British Guiana, my democratic regime was sabotaged and ejected from office.

As regards the peaceful intentions of the United States of America, President Johnson recently said :

"We live in a turbulent world. But amid conflict and confusion, the United States holds firm to its primary goal .. a world of stability, freedom and peace where independent nations can enjoy the benefits of modern knowledge. Here is our difference with the Communists - and our strength. They would use their skills to forge new chains of tyranny. We would use ours to free men from the bonds of the past."

In similar vein the late President Kennedy, in his remarkable address at Washington University, remarked that *"World peace like community peace does not require that each man love his neighbor - it requires only that they live together in mutual tolerance submitting their disputes to just and peaceful settlement."*

But what was our experience? Here in this small colonial outpost, the microcosm of today's world problems, U.S. Citizens and agencies had been busily engaged in undermining parliamentary democracy, by the use of force and violence. The Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), the Washington-based Institute for Free Labour Development, the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade fomented disturbances, which gave the British Government the excuse for withholding independence and imposing the rigged electoral system of proportional representation, long rejected by both the U.S./ British Governments. Despite what the policy makers may say, the "big stick" seems to be still the major instrument of U.S. foreign policy. And there can be no genuine and lasting peace so long as force and fraud are used to store up puppets and a decaying Old Order.

Some have seen U.S. accommodation with the U.S.S.R. as evidence of its peaceful intentions. But it must not be forgotten that in seeking this accommodation the U.S. was facing reality. After all, the policy of cordon sanitaire (encirclement of Communism) and liberation of captive States (Eastern Europe) had failed. Besides, it was necessary to carry out a policy of appeasement at home - to calm jittery nerves frayed by threat of a thermo- nuclear holocaust and of cancer from nuclear fallout.

It is perhaps more realistic to observe that behind the silken glove of accommodation was the iron hand of ruthlessness. One sees evidence of this everywhere in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Asia. In the name of anti-communism, democratic regimes are being undermined and removed from office by force and fraud.

In the Caribbean and Latin America, Pan-Americanism and the Monroe doctrine are invoked to maintain the status quo. Using its traditional anti-colonialism as a shield, the U.S. employed the Monroe doctrine in the early period of its expansionism to keep European colonial powers away from its special preserve in the Western hemisphere. Today anti-communism is made a bogey and the triarchy - the high church, the landlords and the military - are kept in power by whatever means available. And the Monroe doctrine is so used as to be a shield against any new ideas. Those like Quodros, Arosomena, Bosch and Goulart, who attempt to solve growing problems and difficulties - balance of payments, falling prices, loss of markets, declining economic growth rate, inflation, lowered living standards, etc., by exploring new ways and by seeking new contacts with non-traditional sources, are forcibly removed from office.

U.S. philosophy seems to be "if you are not with us, you are against us." Those whom the State Department does not like are uprooted. Some are not allowed to take their seats even after winning at elections. Announced elections are cancelled as in Guatemala, when it is feared that left-wing candidates will win. And those who manage to win are pressed not to fulfill their electoral promises.

It is in this context and against this background that the British Guiana situation must be viewed and understood. My party won in spite of gerrymandering of constituencies and other maneuvers at three consecutive general elections since 1953. My first Government, elected on an overwhelmingly popular vote, lasted in 1953 for only 133 days when British gun boats removed it from office. An engineered split in my party failed to defeat it at the 1957 elections. Despite promises made and commitments given by the British Government and local opposition, independence was denied after our 1961 electoral victory. Even though I was prepared to make all the concessions necessary to allay deliberately engineered fears and apprehension at home and abroad, all my proposals - consultative machinery, civil United Nations presence, guarantees of fundamental rights, independent judiciary, treaty of neutrality as in Austria - were cast aside. Even my offer of a coalition Government of the P. P. P. and the P.N.C. based on parity in the Council of Ministers and a negotiated settlement on the premiership, was rejected. The latter would have had the effect not only of uniting the working class but also of healing the communal breach between the two major ethnic groups in the country.

It is common knowledge here that the P.N.C. rejected my offer of a coalition because of U.S. pressure. This, of course, is understandable. U.S. policy has not materially changed since the start of the Cold War when united front governments embracing socialists, communists and resistance fighters were destroyed in Belgium, France and Italy as a pre-condition to the receipt of Marshall Aid. The last thing the U.S. wants is a strong government which will pursue a policy of non-alignment, anti-imperialism and friendship with Cuba in foreign affairs and pro-working class socialist-oriented democratic reforms in its domestic policy. No wonder a U.P.I. dispatch of December 6, reported that: *"in London and Washington the idea of Jagan leading the colony to independence is anathema."*

Although the vast majority (86% - P. P. P. = 46% ; P.N.C. = 40%) of the Guianese people voted for democracy and socialism, (the P.N.C. leadership demagogically claimed that its policies will be democratic, socialist and non-aligned) they now have foisted upon them a P.N.C.- U.F., coalition Government, the policy of which will be the policy of the ultra reactionary United Force (U.F.). This

party of big business is the main beneficiary of the P.R. elections, and will be the real power behind the throne.

The P.N.C - U.F, alliance is a sell-out to colonialism and imperialism; a betrayal of the interest of the Guianese people. In 1962, when a Commonwealth Commission in the disturbances of February, 1962, came to this country, they wrote that the P.N.C.'s policy was "vague and amorphous", while "the policy of the U.F is more clear and categoric. Mr. D'Aguiar was espousing the cause of businessman and the upper middle class. He himself had an important stake in the country and his politics were therefore not quite free from personal motives."

Already it is becoming clear that the policy of the alliance will be the policy of Big Business. Mr., D'Aguiar, the new Finance Minister has converted a previous compulsory savings scheme into a voluntary one, at the same time doubling the rate of interest and making it tax free! He has warned that it is not his conception of Government that it should compete with private enterprise in business and industry. And the P.N.C leader, no doubt at the behest of his U.S. backers, has dropped reference to democratic socialism, which he demagogically used before and during the election campaign. He now uses glib Madison Avenue slick phrases, like consultative democracy, peace, freedom and equality of opportunity.

There is genuine fear that this country is heading for a Latin American Caudillo-type of rightwing dictatorship. The new regime, having been installed by force and fraud, is likely to perpetuate itself by the same means, especially when disillusionment and disenchantment, particularly of the supporters of the P.N.C, come about. Already the U.S. - financed press is calling for rule by the iron hand and ruthless suppression of those who may oppose this puppet regime. Fearing the denial of the civil liberties and the abrogation of constitutional guarantees, the P. P. P. , at mass rallies held throughout the country put forward the following five-point demands:

- (1) End of rule by emergency and release of all detainees,
- (2) Correction of ethnic imbalance in Police and Security Forces, so that they reflect a broad cross – section of the country.
- (3) New constitutional arrangements.
- (4) New elections under changed electoral system:
- (5) Voting at 18.
- (6) Removal of the Governor.

Americans who cherish freedom and love democracy cannot but be alarmed at the trend of events at home and abroad where principle is being sacrificed at the altar of expediency. That their country is abandoning its traditional policy of anti-colonialism is increasingly being recognised far and wide. Even a former Tory Secretary of State for the Colonies Mr. Iain McLeod in a recent debate in the House of Commons could say that "there is an irony we all recognise in the fact of America urging us all over the world towards colonial freedom except where it approaches their own doorstep. I believe their fears are exaggerated. I do not think Dr. Jagan is a Communist. The American attitude seems dangerous because in my experience if you put off independence because you fear you may get a left-wing government, the most likely thing to happen is that you will get a government even further to the left". And the famous historians Mr. Arnold Toynbee could remark that, "today America is no longer the inspirer and leader of the World revolution ... by contrast America is today the leader of the world-wide anti-revolutionary movement in defence of vested interests. She now stands for what Rome stood for".

British Guiana is the acid test. As the late Anourin Bevan put it in 1953 after the gunboat removal of my Government from office, Western democracy and freedom mean "you are free to have the government you want so long as it is the kind of government we like". There will be no freedom, there will be no peace, until the U.S. abandons the 'big stick' as the instrument of its foreign policy.