

STRAIGHT TALK

GHETTOS EXPLODING SLUMS

- by CHEDDI JAGAN

Racism and all that it implies - poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, ghettos - is inbred in the American system. What's not true, the apologists would say.

And then the line is handed out: we will admit that there is Jimcrow discrimination in the South, but look at the North - Negroes have equality, they are completely free; there is no barrier.

Well, let's look at the North. Almost in every Northern city, the Negro ghettos are exploding. USA is in a state of virtual civil war. And the black people are paying with their blood and their lives.

How free are Negroes in the North? When I was a student in the USA, this is how things stood. In Washington D.C., the capital of the USA, Negroes in general and students of the Negro Howard University, were excluded from certain hotels, cinemas and theatres. In certain of the very cheap cinemas in the transition areas, there was a wall in the middle - Negroes ^{on} one side; whites on the other.

Take the case of Dr. Orrin Dummett. He and I shared a room in the Negro ghetto in Washington when we took our pre-dental course at Howard University. But when we moved to Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago, Dr. Dummett got into trouble. He could not get a room in the near - North side where the school is situated. At the beginning, he had to live in the Southside, several miles ^{away} in the Negro ghetto. Later, he was able to get accommodation near the school in a church. This was possible because he agreed to look after and take care of the heating system.

Incidentally, Dr. Dummett is now in charge of the Health Center in Watts, Los Angeles which was the scene of the explosion last year.

Apparently, things haven't changed much since ^{my student} these days. Take the Newark rebellion, which sparked off the revolt in more than a half-dozen cities.

The reason for unarmed people hurling stones and bottles at a police station was police brutality against a Negro taxi-cab driver, John William Smith. But this was only the spark which ignited the combustible material. The end result was more than 25 men, women and children murdered, nearly a thousand wounded and about 2,000 arrested.

Governor Hughes dubbed the rebellion "criminal insurrection" by people who are "against America". Others hurled similar epithets - "rioters on the rampage", "looters", "thieves" and "snipers".

But the picketers of the New York branch of Youth Against War and Fascism put it correctly. "This is not a race riot", they said, "this is a massacre of an oppressed people - like the shooting in Sharpeville".

Of course, those who "chain" and shoot oppressed and exploited people always have some excuse.

"They're trying to take over - to elect a Negro Mayor", a racist Newark official told a newspaper reporter

Even if this were so, there is nothing wrong with it, the Black Power advocated would say. Negroes account for 53% of the city's population according to official statistics. But the figure is nearer 60% according to the unofficial recess sources.

In a Negro-majority city, the Negroes have no say. Indeed, there is vile discrimination.

Fifty acres of land where ~~the~~ 20,000 Negro families are crowded under slum conditions are to be cleared not for new housing for them, but for a College of Dentistry!

Although 76% of the children in Newark are Negro, the 9-man School Board has only 3 Negroes. Recently, the White Negro Mayor appointed a white political hack with a high school education in preference to Wilbur Parker, a Negro with a master's degree.

Unemployment in Newark hits mainly the Negroes. Among them are 20,000 youths between ages 16 and 25 who cannot find work.

For the Negro, it is a question of poverty within poverty - he is the poorest of the poor.

And in Affluent America, the poor are really poor. This is how the pro-imperialist Time magazine set it out on May 13, 1966.

"More than 7,500,000 Americans live in rat-infested tenements or tumbledown shacks that are officially and euphemistically - classified as "dilapidated"; 1,500 U.S. citizens still die yearly from diseases caused by malnutrition; 6,000,000 subsist on free Government surpluses. In today's society, the nation's 11 million functional illiterates are

relegated for life to the precarious ranks of the poor.

Paradoxically, it is the neediest who are helped least by the welfare state. The majority of the poor reap no benefits from the security, unemployment insurance, or the right to unionize. Farm subsidies mostly enrich the prosperous; the poorest farmers, with 40% of the working spreads in the U.S., accounts for a scant 7% of farm income. Public housing has brought the poor more eviction notices than new apartments and slum dwellers scornfully refer to urban renewal as "urban removal". While Washington lavishes \$18 billion a year on a galaxy of welfare programmes - to which the state and local governments and private philanthropies add another \$15 billion - only the crumbs reach the bottom of the heap".

According to another authority, Michael Harrington, another of the America, the estimated 32 million Americans who live in poverty "exist beyond history, beyond progress, sunk in a paralyzing, maiming routine".

For the poor, Johnson's Great Society started a war - against-poverty programme. But the Director, of the programme, Sargent Shriver, recently lamented:

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"We were just about to put the bottle
in the baby's mouth and we find that
there is damned little milk to give".

There is "damned little milk" because the Vietnam blunder is costing many more billions than was anticipated. To help pay for the additional troops required in Vietnam, President Johnson is likely to propose a 10% surtax on personal and company income tax rates.

CASUALTIES MOUNTING

The guns-and-butter policy is just not paying off. There is less and less "butter", and more and more guns, burdens and casualties.

And the casualties are not limited to Vietnam. In the Detroit revolt alone 50 lives were lost and about \$900 million of property destroyed. And this seems to be just the beginning. For public reaction to the events so far is not a demand for social justice, but for more police action.

But police brutality will not stop the Negro struggle for emancipation. For too long they have suffered economically and socially.

Running away from the jimcrow-South, they have found themselves herded in overcrowded ghettos in the Northern cities where they made up a sizeable minority, in some cases a majority. Although overall Negroes are only 11% of the US population, they represent about 20% of the inner cities of the North.

Overcrowding, discrimination, poor equipped schools, unemployment have exacted their toll. Little wonder that 50% failed physical or mental examination for induction into the army.

Ghetto surroundings have affected family life. Fewer than half of all Negroes who reached the age of 18 lived all of their lives with both parents; 21% of Negro families were fatherless; at least 25%, and maybe as many as 40%, of Negro children were illegitimate.

According to the Moynihan Report on the Negro family, "The evidence - not final but powerfully persuasive - is that the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling. For vast numbers, the

fabric of conventional social relationship has all but disintegrated."

Clearly, the fabric must be restored. But to do so means abandoning the guns-and-butter policy. The billions spent on Vietnam, and in CIA subversion and military intervention elsewhere must be diverted to eradicating poverty, slums and ghettos in the U.S.A.

But this will come about only from a ~~removal~~ revolution in thinking of the power elite, the military-industrial complex. Imperialist USA is now at the crossroads. What is needed is an agonizing re-appraisal, an end to the cold war, and to the policy of the Big Stick.

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