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STATEMENT ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN GUYANA BY DR. CHEDDI
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NATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION)

Discrimination on racial grounds is not a new phenomenon in the world, but in this, the latter half of the twentieth century, it is unquestionably the single most explosive problem facing mankind.

It has been a problem in Guyana long before it erupted into violence some years ago. In the colonial era it took the form of white discrimination - in top jobs, in social eminence, in sport - against non-whites, but it was inevitably linked with the politico-economic situation of the country, the then British Guiana.

A few years after the end of the Second World War, the PPP was able to forge a unity between the major racial groups sufficiently strong to challenge the entrenched position of British imperialism; so much so that it became necessary to land troops and overthrow the PPP Government of the day. Divide-and-rule tactics were thereafter intensified and local prejudices and fears played upon and accentuated. So successful was imperialism in this that hostility between the major racial groups one to another crystallised into a real and frightening thing, a monster that became uncontrollable in the 1962/1964 period.

No doubt there were also other forces at work, imponderables such as the question of who was to fill the political "vacuum" as sociologists called it, when the British left; the fears of certain religious groups whose position of superiority was eliminated when the PPP took office in 1961.

Today, racial discrimination in Guyana is very much a fact of life. It is actively encouraged and practised by many public officials who owe their positions to political patronage. It has created many deep fissures in the community, partly through historical accident and partly by deliberate political policies and attitudes.

The historical accident lay in the fact that the bulk of the East Indian population who have supported the PPP for the past twenty years are agricultural workers, the peasantry working on the sugar estates and in the rice fields; whereas the bulk of support for the governing party was to be found in the urban areas.

When the PPP was in office, the anti-PPP propaganda was that it was doing every-thing for the agricultural sector and neglecting the urban workers. But now that the PNC is in power and they have belatedly come to realise, if even only partially, how important the agricultural sector is to the economy of the country, this kind of propaganda has been abandoned. But the damage had already been done. Their supporters' clamour for jobs had to be met and has led to a continuing policy of discrimination in employment policies, in hiring and firing, and in promotion and demotion.

Racism, like crime and prostitution, is part and parcel of capitalist-imperialist exploitation. And so long as the economic structure of capitalism-imperialism persists, the ideological superstructure will maintain this evil. Consequently, any serious effort to end the curse of racism must aim at ending colonialist, neo-colonialist and imperialist rule. Only a new economic system (socialism) based on public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange will eradicate racism.