

MAY DAY (1989) SPEECH BY CHEDDI JAGAN

Cde Chairman,

The last Prime Minister of Trinidad, Dr. Eric Williams, once said about the West Indies Federation that ten minus one equals zero.

I say 20 per cent on \$25 equals zero. It can't work.

The government says: bear the pain; pain will lead to gain, to recovery. This is ridiculous; it's building castles in the air and false hopes.

Anyone who thinks that this clique which wrecked our country during the past 25 years can bring recovery during the next 3 years needs to have his head examined.

They have sunk our people to the lowest depths of degradation.

Compare what the minimum wage could buy when they took power 25 years ago and now. Then 66 eggs could be bought, now only 9; then 6½ pounds beef, now only ½ pound; then 6 pounds chicken, now only ½ pound; then 10½ pints cooking oil, now only ¾ pint; then 3 ¾ gallons rice, now only 6 pints; then 10 gallons of kerosene, now only 1 gallon; then 61½ pounds of sugar, now only 10½ pounds; then 80 pounds of salt, now only 7½ pounds; then 10 pounds of garlic, now ½ pound; then 26½ pints split peas, now only 1 pint.

How shameful! Imagine a worker slaving a whole day to be able to buy ½ pound of beef or chicken or ¾ pint of cooking oil or 1 pint of split peas.

Our ancestors as chattel slaves used to get more as daily rations. Courageously they fought and last year we proudly celebrated the 150th Anniversary of the abolition of slavery. We say enough is enough. Let us now strengthen our unity under FITUG and support its general strike call for an end to PNC-IMF slavery.

We are told that this budget will bring recovery. We heard that song before: in 1978, when the government with a secret agreement rammed down our throats the first dose of IMF medicine. But at the end in 1981, we were worse off. Instead of recovery, there was retrogression: negative economic growth and rampant double digit inflation.

Then the TUC documented your plight. Its Economic and Research Committee said the worker earned only \$250 per month but needed \$654 monthly to keep body and soul together for his family of six. Under PNC neo-colonialism, the worker is worse off than even under British colonialism. For instance in 1942, a working class survey showed

a worker in Albouystown was earning only \$7.41 per week but had to spend \$8.23.

IMF medicine, first dose, nearly killed the patient: life for the working man had become unbearable, he was eating one meal a day and his child was going to school with bare tea in the morning. That was how TUC General Secretary in 1982 put the plight of our working people.

During the last three years, more IMF doses were stealthily pushed down our throats. Did they bring about a cure? Definitely not. The harsh facts are staring us in the face. The Inter-American Development Bank in its 1988 Report told us about the toll on the lives of our children. It pointed out:

"...health status of Guyana's population has worsened in recent years as the country's economy has deteriorated. Malnutrition has contributed to increased infant mortality and the incidence of communicable diseases is relatively high".

Before this IMF-dictated structural-adjustment budget, the TUC said that to cope with inflation and the galloping cost of living, a minimum daily wage of \$93.77 was needed. Now much more is needed with the reduction of purchasing power by at least one-third.

And by the way, a recent Stabroek News survey says that the barest necessities, for a family of five persons require a daily minimum wage of \$174; and for the basic necessities of human existence \$260 per day.

What is this puppet government giving? Twenty per cent wage increase to bring the minimum wage to about \$30 per day. This is an insult to injury. They are tightening the noose more tightly around our necks.

And always it's the same tune; they don't have money. In 1978-79, when they didn't pay the agreed \$14-a-day minimum wage, reduced subsidies and dismissed workers, they told the TUC; tell us from where to find the money.

We in GAWU told the special TUC Conference in October 1978; get the money from the super rich, the high and mighty, by firstly suspending the debt payments or paying only a portion and secondly by cutting down the fat salaries, allowances and privileges of the governmental aristocracy.

Comrades, there is ^{an} IMF/government conspiracy to solve the financial crisis at your expense. But the ~~privileges~~ ^{privileges} of the ruling aristocrats will remain sacrosanct and will increase, and the IMF will lend money so that the super-rich and the mighty could be paid. But you will have to pay with more and more taxation for more and more borrowing. This is what IMF structural adjustment really means for the working people.

The government keeps repeating ad nauseam that there is no alternative to the IMF, that opposition forces are simply trying to take advantage of the situation and resorting to violence to bring down the government. But that was not the objective of the TUC Special Conference in late 1979 when it said that the economic crisis would not be solved without a political solution. But what happened: the TUC's proposals were rejected completely by the government -- not one ~~word~~ was accepted, said the TUC General Secretary.

Last year, Anglican Bishop Randolph George referred to the general feeling of frustration and hopelessness. Now, the Anglican Bishop and the Catholic Bishop have issued a joint statement. They say that "if violent reactions are to be avoided in this worsening economic crisis," certain broad principles and guidelines must be observed.

They outlined 7 principles for national reconciliation. These include: relief aid for the suffering, free of discrimination; freedom of expression followed by correction of wrongs where possible; the right to peaceful protest; workers' right to organise and the independence of their organisations; the right to full information; the right of each citizen to protection by the security forces; the right to free and fair elections.

We in GAWU fully support these principles. We call on the government immediately to

- 1) meet with FITUG to open talks for improved wage, salaries and working conditions, restoration of subsidies, re-introduction of price controls.
- 2) meet with the PCD to discuss electoral reforms to ensure free and fair elections.
- 3) enter into an open dialogue with all patriotic forces to find a real alternate way forward.

If the reasonable demands of FITUG are not met, if the government does not stop its harassment of trade unions, their leaders and members, if the government does not treat with the unions industrially, GAWU fully support FITUG's stance that it "will be forced to make political demands -- a general election to resolve the stalemate.

Comrades, let us stand firmly behind FITUG. Let us strengthen working class and racial unity; let us build the closest worker/farmer links. Let us embrace the radical intelligentsia and the progressive businessmen. And now is the time for those in the PNC who are patriotic and hold anti-imperialist and socialist views to show their colours and take a stand. We must together make our beloved Guyana a nation we all can be proud of. LONG LIVE MAY DAY; LONG LIVE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY