

# TRIBUTE to JAWAHARLAL NEHRU



BIRTH CENTENARY 1889 — 1989

by Dr. Cheddi Jagan

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## Introduction

by Clinton Collymore M.P.

The birth centenary of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India following the independence of that sub-continent from Great Britain was commemorated on November 13, 1989 in many parts of the world, including Guyana. Leaders in both East and West paid tribute to him.

PPP General Secretary Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the Leader of the Opposition in the Guyana Parliament, wrote a Paper for an Indian periodical. This booklet is the full text of the Paper and represents the warm feelings of the PPP towards a man who contributed so much to the liberation of mankind.

Nehru's concepts of Non Alignment remain fully valid today, 25 years after his death in 1964. The India he left as a legacy has developed tremendously over the years, though it has had to surmount more than its fair share of turbulence. India today is a major power in South East Asia and in the Indian Ocean, with the economic and military means to project that power.

India has a developing science and technology, satellites in space, ballistic delivery systems, nuclear power, a growing economy, but more significant a democracy of 806 million people, with an electorate which reached 498.6 million in 1989.

The names of Nehru and Gandhi cannot be separated from the achievements of Modern India.

December, 1989.



Picture to left is of Rajiv Gandhi, while the picture to right is of his mother Indira Gandhi. She was brutally assassinated by Sikh terrorists in 1984, in revenge for her decision to send security forces into the Golden Temple Sikh Shrine to flush out armed terrorists hiding there. Upon her death, the Congress elected Rajiv to become Party leader and Prime Minister of India.

Rajiv has served only one term, having been defeated by the opposition in November 1989, united in a National Front. While the Congress Party (I) secured the most seats in the Lok Sabha (Parliament) and the National Front failed to get an absolute majority, no other party was willing to form a coalition with the Congress. Rajiv therefore resigned to become opposition leader in the House.

The Communist Parties in the House opted to give parliamentary support to the National Front and are being wooed by the National Front to participate in the government.

This is the second occasion since independence in 1947, that the Congress Party is in opposition. The last time was in 1977, when the Janata Party coalition won the elections. This coalition collapsed, however, in mid-term, and the Congress under Indira romped back to power with a landslide majority in the House.

# Tribute To Jawaharlal Nehru

by Cheddi Jagan, M.P.

On this 100th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, I wish to record my deep respect and admiration for this Great man, who helped to shed light over a huge part of the world and to ignite the torch of the liberation movements that trail-blazed the path he trod.

Nehru was hailed by Rabindranath Tagore as "a soldier whose banner is the banner of the exploited, and a patriot whose humanity and vision are not obstructed by the barriers of his land and its past [and had offered India] two priceless gifts, a right to live bravely and a right to think intelligently".<sup>1</sup>

To Mahatma Gandhi, he was "pure as crystal [and] truthful beyond suspicion". In today's world of so much political corruption, his name stands out as a priceless gem.

I first came to know of one of India's greatest heroes during my student days (1938-1943) in the United States. Then, apart from World War II, India's independence was one of the biggest political issues. Nehru's autobiography *Toward Freedom* inspired and fired me. His impact on me was great; he became my hero and was to influence my life profoundly. In a sense, he became my political foster father.

What impressed me most was his total commitment. Like his illustrious father, he threw away a lucrative career in law and the comforts of a most luxurious home to give unlimited service to the cause of Swaraj. And he was prepared to pay the price for that commitment — about nine years as a prisoner of the British raj.

But his commitment was much more than personal sacrifice. It had a revolutionary and social dimension.

Nehru came to the political scene at a time when the Indian National Congress was dominated by "Moderates" whose political platform did not extend to the demand for independence. He played a major role in revolutionising the politics of Congress.

His concept of liberation was not just political independence from Britain; it was also economic and social emancipation.

For me, socio-economic emancipation came naturally: I grew up in a sugar plantation and grinding poverty; my parents eked out a miserable existence as sugar workers. But for Nehru, it meant virtually class betrayal. His case was not what he grew up in, but what he saw.

While he was still indecisive about a total plunge into political life, a major influence came from his exposure in 1921 to the conditions affecting the rural poor. Spending three days in villages where there was a protest by peasants, a new world was opened before his eyes. What he saw revolted him. As he wrote in his autobiography:

"I was filled with shame at my own easy-going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of semi-naked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India. A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed and utterly miserable."<sup>2</sup>

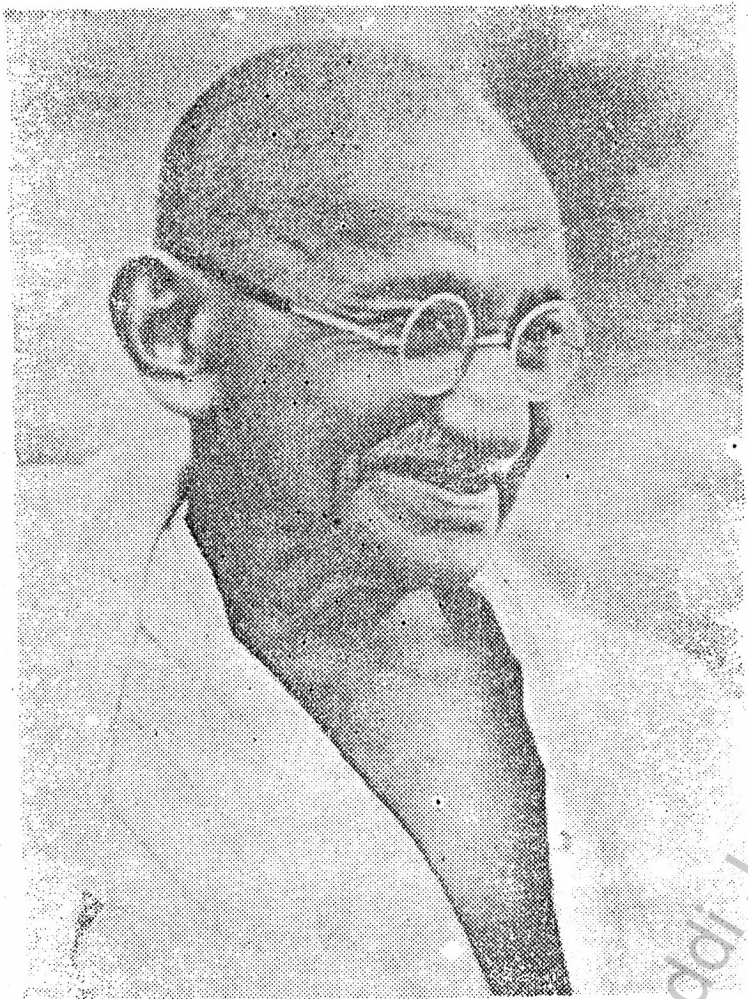
For Nehru, in order to end exploitation "political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions." This new awakening brought him to socialism, which he noted is "the only key to the solution of the world's problems and of India's problems". He went on to point out that it was "not merely an economic doctrine ... it was a vital creed which I hold with all my head and heart".<sup>3</sup>

He saw socialism as an alternative to imperialism and exploitation. Capitalism, he wrote, led to "exploitation of one man by another, one group by another and one country by another". And he saw it from a practical political point of view. In order to secure mass support for the struggle for independence, he said, "we must clearly lay down an economic programme for the masses, with socialism as its ideal. We must cultivate a revolutionary outlook."<sup>4</sup>

We also had the same outlook. In constituting the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) in 1946 in British Guiana (now Guyana), we followed Nehru's footsteps. In our aims, we stated:

**To assist the growth and development of the Labour and Progressive Movements of British Guiana to the end of establishing a strong disciplined and enlightened Party, equipped with the theory of scientific socialism.**





Seen here is the Mahatma (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi) Spiritual Founder of Modern India. His principles and values have made an indelible impact throughout the world, where struggle against oppression is concerned.

Whilst we spoke of "scientific socialism," Nehru talked about "some form of socialism". Considering our different backgrounds and time frames, that was understandable. My politics developed at the end of World War II when socialism became a world system and the prestige of the Soviet Union was at its pinnacle. Also I came from a working class background and was the founder of the Political Affairs Committee in 1946 and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in 1950. Whilst the PPP was a class coalition, I was the leader of the Party and the balance of forces was with the left.

In contrast, Nehru's background was different. And he came to the Indian National Congress not only late in the day, but also at a time when the moderates of the middle class, who were nationalist-minded, mainly influenced the ideology and methods of the anti-colonial struggle. In his early days, he and Subhas Chandra Bose invigorated the Indian youth and students with their views which projected them to the left of the Congress. In this regard, he declared his belief in socialism.

Like me, Nehru's conviction about socialism was in a large way influenced by the example of what was taking place in the USSR. He opined:

If the future is full of hope, it is largely because of Soviet Russia and what it has done; and I am convinced that if some world catastrophe does not intervene, this new civilisation will spread to other lands, and put an end to the wars and conflicts which capitalism feeds.

But in practical politics, his position was the middle ground — between the business interests and those radical nationalists who followed a consistently socialist line.

Nehru was stimulated into political action by the Mahatma and became very early one of his chief disciples. He was Plato to Gandhi's Socrates and having put his faith in him (Gandhi) gave him almost a blank cheque. However, repeatedly he had serious differences with Gandhi on numerous issues and also came in conflict with several other leaders including his father Motilal. In spite of these conflicts, he remained high in the estimation of Gandhi and other leaders because of their recognition of his tremendous ability in the difficult process of organising Congress as an effective fighting force.

On several occasions, Nehru found himself torn between loyalties and in deep conflict of mind when serious



divisions came into the movement. And very often he ended in the middle ground having to lead the efforts for a compromise. Similarly, in my nearly 40 years of leadership of the PPP, I often found myself in the middle between "right" and "left" deviations.

It was this spirit of compromise and political pragmatism which led him in the Nehru/Mountbatten talks to a partitioned India and domestic and foreign policies for the first few years in post-independence India for which his administration was subject to much criticism.

Not only was Nehru a great patriot, he was also a firm internationalist . . . . He wrote:

We have our problems, difficult and intricate and we cannot run away from them and take shelter in the wider problems that affect the world. But if we ignore the world we do so at our peril.

Nehru envisaged foreign policy to be premised on two pillars — idealism and realism: "If it is not idealistic, it becomes one of sheer opportunism; if it is not realistic, then it is likely to be adventurist and wholly ineffective".<sup>6</sup>

India's idealism was rooted in nationalistic anti-imperialism. As long ago as 1927, Nehru had attended the "Congress of Oppressed Nationalities" and was elected to the presidium of the Conference and to the 9-man executive committee of the League Against Imperialism which was constituted by the Conference. In his report to the All India Congress Committee, he referred to the stranglehold of the "rising imperialism of the United States" over Central and South America.

Realism meant facing the facts that India was linked economically to Britain and other Western countries, and that some powerful economic interests within the Congress preferred a junior partner role in alliance with the West.

Internally, his social upbringing and gentility did not lead him to a confrontation course with the vested interests — big capitalists and landlords inside and outside the Congress. While he himself was willing to endure the necessary hardships, he did not want the masses to go through the sacrifices linked to the struggle for social change. Like earlier utopian socialists, he saw the emergence of socialism from above by good-intentioned, idealistic people like himself; he did not perceive it coming from the revolutionary actions of the masses.

And in any case, with the all-class Indian National Congress adopting Gandhian non-violent methods of struggle, the class struggle was not an option for the attainment of socialism. Nehru himself did not wish "to force the issue of socialism in the Congress and thereby create difficulties in the way of our struggle for independence."<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, it was not long before India forged a resolute course of independence and peace. This was influenced by the class battles inside India and the Indian people's overwhelming sympathy and support for the peoples who were struggling for political independence at the end of World War II, when imperialist Britain, France and Holland returned to South East Asia to impose colonial rule.

The liberation of Indonesia by armed struggle from Dutch rule in 1949, the defeat of the reactionary Chiang-Kai-Shek clique by the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the failure of US imperialism to subjugate socialist North Korea (1950-53) and Anglo-American encouragement and support for Pakistan were all additional factors which influenced development towards an independent, non-aligned and progressive direction.

It was in this context that an invitation to visit India came from Nehru towards the end of 1953. In October that year, the British Churchill-led government had landed troops in British Guiana, suspended the Constitution and forcibly removed us from the government, of which I was the elected head. Our overwhelming victory of 18 out of 24 seats only 133 days before had alarmed the plantocracy. The excuse for the "gunboat diplomacy" was our alleged plans to set fire to the capital Georgetown to establish a communist state.

Sir Oliver Lyttleton, the British Commonwealth Secretary went beyond the confines of our little country. He stated that "Her Majesty's government would not tolerate the establishment of communist states in the British Commonwealth".

This of course had to be seen against the background of the Cold War, started in 1947 by the Anglo-American, Winston Churchill/Harry Truman axis. President Truman at Baylor University on March 6, had made a speech on foreign economic policy which clearly stated that governments which conducted planned economies and controlled foreign trade were dangers to freedom; that freedom of

speech and worship were dependent on the free enterprise system. He pointed out that controlled economies were "not the American way" and "not the way of peace". He urged that "the whole world should adopt the American system" and that "the American system could survive in America only if it became a world system".

Calling for action, he implored: "Unless we act and act decisively, it [government-controlled economy and government-controlled foreign trade] will be the pattern of the next century . . . if this trend is not reversed, the government of the United States will be under pressure, sooner or later, to use these same devices to fight for markets and for raw materials".

**These cold-war pro-imperialist and anti-Communist tenets were anathema to Nehru. He was familiar with anglo-American intrigues and conspiracy. There were the Kanpur Communist Conspiracy Case (1924) and the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929). During the legislative debate on the Public Safety Act in 1928, he had ridiculed the British claim that communism posed a danger to India.**

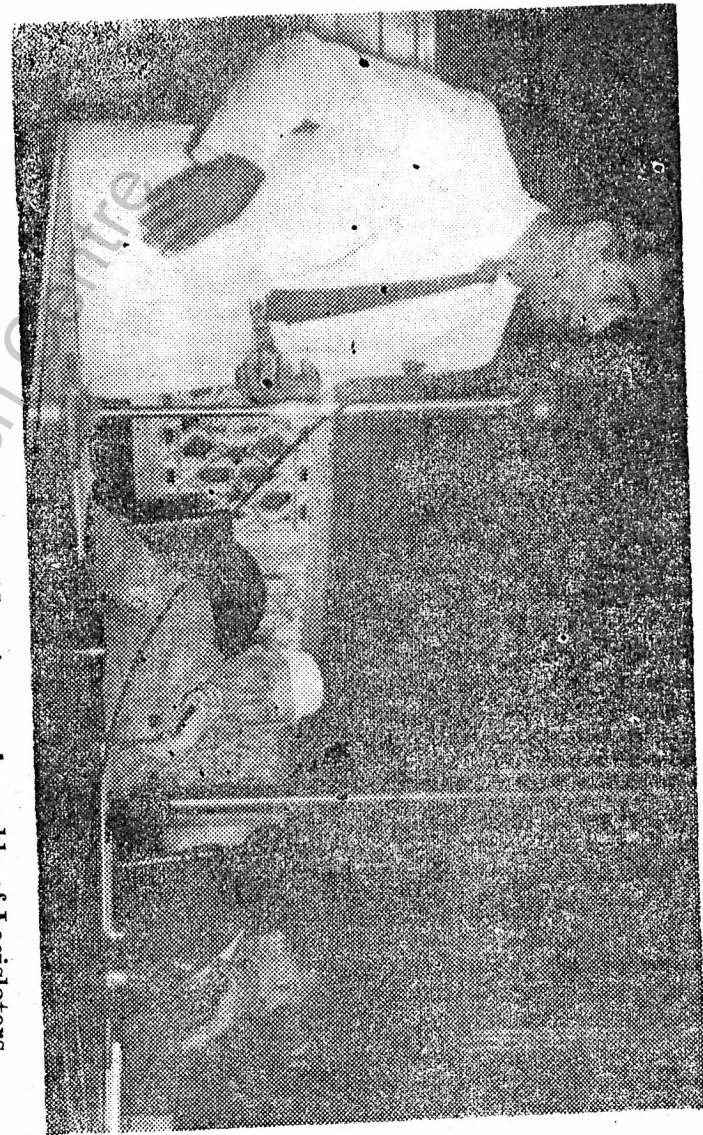
In 1929, he had taken a leading part in organizing a Meerut Prisoners' Defense Committee, after the British raj had used the anti-communist bogey to strike at the Indian trade union movement. Later, he had said: "**The danger to India is not communism. It is right-wing communalism.**"<sup>8</sup> As Gandhi wrote: "It seems to me that the motive behind these prosecutions is not to kill communism, but to strike terror."<sup>9</sup>

With this background and the fact that I was an overseas Indian, no doubt influenced Nehru's invitation to visit India.

L. F. S. Burnham, then Chairman of the PPP and ex-Minister of Education in the deposed government, who had accompanied me to London for the debate on British Guiana, joined me. We arrived in New Delhi in November 1953 and made a lightning tour of the principal cities. **The highlight of the visit was an address in New Delhi to an informal assembly of the members of both Houses of Parliament with the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, in the chair. Wherever we went, we were warmly received, sometimes with great pomp and ceremony.**

One incident I always recall: In an after-dinner relaxed atmosphere at his residence, Nehru asked: "Incidentally, what is the population of British Guiana?" When I replied "little over half-a-million", he expressed surprise and then remarked: "All this excitement for such a small

Dr. Cheddi Jagan is seen here addressing an Assembly of Legislators from both Houses of the Indian Parliament. In centre is Jawaharlal Nehru, while to right is Forbes Burnham.





number of people! We have more than half-a-million in our small villages". By excitement he meant the banner headlines which the gunboat action aroused in the international press.

Although protocol treatment from the Indian government was strictly correct and support from the people unreserved, somehow I had the impression that in official quarters we were in the way. The government of India seemed hesitant to make a firm declaration of support. I was made to understand that India was in trouble with the United States over Pakistan and Korea and thus needed the support of the British government. Moreover, the Indian government, preoccupied with its own Communists in Kerala, Hyderabad and elsewhere, was somewhat influenced by the British government's anti-communist propaganda against us.

Nehru, according to his biographer Michael Brecher, had a "split mentality to communism". He said he had an "infatuation" to communism, "which lingered on for at least twenty years."<sup>10</sup>

Nehru was first attracted to communism at Brussels in 1927. Later he wrote in his autobiography that he had "goodwill towards communism, for whatever its fault it was at least not hypocritical and not imperialistic". According to Professor Hiren Mukerjee, he "never gave doctrinal adherence to Communism, either then or later, but was emotionally drawn towards the dreams of a classless social order, often however waking up to feel repelled by some kind or other of communist practice."<sup>11</sup>

Nehru wrote that "Communists often irritated me by their dictatorial ways, their aggressive and rather vulgar methods, their habit of denouncing everybody who did not agree with them." And they had "a peculiar method of irritating others". But at the same time, he admired the communists for their zeal and devotion. He observed:

They are a sorely tried people, and outside the Soviet Union, they have to contend with enormous difficulties. I have always admired their great courage and capacity for sacrifice. They suffer greatly, as unhappily untold millions suffer in various ways, but not blindly before a malign and all-powerful fate. They suffer, as human beings and there is a tragic nobility about such suffering.

He paid tribute to Lenin as the greatest of communists, with an "organic sense of life" and "marching step by

step with history . . . . To a small extent every communist, who has understood the philosophy of his movement, has it."<sup>12</sup>

With the South East Asian crisis in 1954, India was propelled forward and became deeply respected internationally. During the next few years, Nehru, who had provided leadership to the national liberation movement in the Third World, reached the pinnacle in his political career. As the "dove of peace", he was resolutely opposed to war. He said:

I want to take my people forward. I want to build dams, schools, hospitals, reservoirs. I want to plough the fields and make them fertile. Therefore I will not get involved in war. I will not join either party bloc. I shall remain neutral.

Indian public opinion was angered with the United States-Pakistan military alliance in 1954 and the attempt by the "Colossus of the North" to incorporate the sub-continent in its war plan. The attempt to include the Asian states into a military pact along the lines of the earlier-constituted North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Bagdad Pact, and to organise a combined military action against Vietnam was vigorously opposed by Nehru.

India took the initiative to organise the Conference of Colombo powers (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia) to reach a common stand in favour of non-intervention and peace in Vietnam.

India under Nehru's leadership also played an important role in favour of peace at Geneva after the disastrous defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The Nehru/Chou En-lai meeting in June 1954 constituted a notable development in international relations. It began the process of better understanding and co-operation between the two Asian giants in the cause of peace on the basis of peaceful co-existence.

In April 1955, the Colombo Powers took the initiative in convening the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, at which Nehru assumed centre-stage. They saw the need for a non-aligned position for the purpose of improving the world political climate and utilising manpower and other resources for development, economic emancipation and social progress.

The concept of non-alignment originated in India, and "took root in the halls of the United Nations in 1946



and 1947".<sup>13</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, regarded as the father of non-alignment, played a decisive moral/political role in the post-war period, filling the vacuum created by the death of President F. D. Roosevelt and the failure of his successor President Harry Truman to continue his predecessor's "New Deal" policy at home, "Good Neighbour" policy in Latin America and mediator role between Winston Churchill and Josef Stalin during World War II. As the then leader of the Interim National Government, he declared on December 7, 1946:

**We propose, as far as possible, to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disasters on an ever vaster scale . . . we shall take full part in international conferences as a free nation with our own policy and not as a satellite of another nation.**<sup>14</sup>

Nehru made it clear that non-alignment did not mean neutrality; that it had a negative as well as a positive aspect — negative, in the sense of not being aligned with any military bloc, but as he put it, 'this in itself is not a policy, it is only part of a policy'; positive, in the sense of concern for peace and socio-economic development. This was spelt out by him in a speech at Columbia University on October 17, 1949 when he described the totality of India's foreign policy:

**The pursuit of peace, not through alignment with any major power or groups of powers, but through an independent approach to each controversial or disputed issue, the liberation of subject peoples, the maintenance of freedom, both national and individual, the elimination of racial discrimination, elimination of want, disease and ignorance which afflict the greater part of the world's population.**<sup>15</sup>

It was significant that at the same time when Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Dwight Eisenhower were meeting in Washington, the Nehru/Chou En-lai dialogue was going on in New Delhi.

The 29 States which met at Bandung, though holding different positions (8 — non-aligned; 2 — socialists; 19 — pro-West) unanimously adopted a Declaration on the Promotion of World Peace and Co-operation, a set of ten

basic principles. These included the five principles of peace or **Panch Shila**, which had been inserted in the preamble of the Tibet Agreement of June 24, 1954 between India and the People's Republic of China.<sup>16</sup>

- mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
- non-aggression;
- non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
- equality and mutual benefit;
- peaceful co-existence.

The other five points included a stand for national freedom and against colonialism and racial discrimination, for the prohibition of nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons; for economic and cultural co-operation of the nations of Asia and Africa; and on specific questions affecting West Asian, Palestinian, Aden and the North African nations. These became the guiding principles of, and provided the framework for, the first Non-Aligned Summit Conference in Belgrade in 1961 and subsequent meetings.

**The Bandung Conference, representing the majority of mankind, and asserting the spirit of independence and anti-imperialist struggle, and advancing friendly relations and co-operation between the newly-liberated countries of Asia and Africa and the socialist states, was a slap in the face of imperialism. It became an important factor in world politics, and thus facilitated the cause of peace and the growth and success of the national liberation movement.**

The United States was furious with Nehru for jettisoning the South East Asia Treaty Organisation and moving Afro-Asian countries towards a non-aligned position. Angered that its allies, chiefly Malaysia and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), did not succeed in their orations about "communist imperialism" and "communist aggression" to turn Bandung from an anti-imperialist into an anti-communist Conference, the USA denounced the concept of non-alignment.

John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State, on June 9, 1955, stated that US mutual assistance treaties — with forty-two countries of America, Europe and Asia . . . abolish as between the parties, the principle of neutrality, which pretends that a nation can best gain safety for itself by being indifferent to the fate of others. This has increasingly become an obsolete conception and, except under



In the early 1970s, during a spate of visits to Guyana by prominent world personalities, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came. She was warmly welcomed by the Guyanese people. In this picture, she is seen sharing pleasant comments with PPP Leader Cheddi Jagan.

very exceptional circumstances, it is an immoral and shortsighted conception.<sup>17</sup>

Vice-President Richard Nixon on July 5 also condemned it and warned against the "brand of neutralism that makes no moral distinction between the Communist world and the free world. With this viewpoint, we have no sympathy."<sup>18</sup> In other words, the US government position was blunt: If you are not with us, you are against us. Non-Aligned states were thus treated as enemies, at best semi-enemies.

The United States, not only did not take part in the Geneva Conference on Vietnam in the summer of 1954, but also did not respect the decisions of the Conference for a non-aligned Laos and Cambodia and for elections in 1956 to unite North and South Vietnam. In fact, the CIA engineered the overthrow of the Sihanouk non-aligned government of Cambodia and escalated the war in Indochina.

Events in Asia, particularly in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were an extension of the direct and indirect intervention in British Guiana. After our return from India, the British used divide-and-rule methods as in India, the only differences being that in the case of the latter the weapon was religion; in Guiana, it was race.

L. F. S. Burnham was persuaded to split our Party in 1955. Nevertheless, the PPP went on to win elections again in 1957 and 1961. However, to forestall independence on the ground that an independent Guyana under the PPP would become "a second Cuba", covert actions by British Intelligence and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were employed to destabilise the PPP government in order to instal in power L. F. S. Burnham, whom the British had described as "an opportunist, racist and demagogue, intent only on personal power."<sup>19</sup>

The strife, strikes, arson, mayhem and murder which were fomented and financed by the CIA led to bloodshed and racial clashes. The Insight Team on 16th April 1967 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."

On April 23, the Insight Team in another story, "Macmillan, Sandys backed CIA's anti-Jagan plot," impli-

cated 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 British security forces had the capability to put down the anarchist counter-revolutionary elements and to stop the violence. But they had a different agenda. The clashes were to provide the British government with the excuse to renege on their 1960 agreements to confer the prize of independence to the victor of the 1961 elections and to change the first-past-the-post voting system to proportional representation in order to remove the PPP government.

All of this was typical of British intrigues in India. Moulana Azad recalls Lord Mountbatten's categorical assurances before partition: "I shall see to it there is no bloodshed and riot. I am a soldier, not a civilian. I shall take the sternest measures to nip trouble in the bud. I will order the Army and the Air Force to act and will use tanks and aeroplanes..." But "nothing effective" was done either to prevent or to stop the "holocaust" on either side.<sup>19</sup>

When as Premier, I saw Nehru and his daughter Indira again in London in late 1962 and related our problems, he evinced great interest. But he was not the same robust, dynamic person I had seen nine years earlier. No doubt experiences such as those with Mountbatten, with whom he had built a close friendship, aged him. China, on which Nehru had placed such confidence and hopes, proved a great disappointment: its incursion into India was a shattering blow.

The "Light of Asia", as Winston Churchill called him, flickered out a couple years after that meeting in London. But the memory of that champion of independence and freedom and the principal architect of non-alignment

lives on. He stands out as a giant: one of the greatest figures of our times — a man of the highest integrity, greatest devotion to cause and total commitment to struggle. His untiring efforts to keep India as a secular state and his constant quest for peace will always be remembered.

Today, on the Nehru Centennial, the greatest tribute we can pay to him is to rededicate ourselves to struggle for the goals he charted: independence, detente, peaceful co-existence, disarmament, peace, development and social progress.

#### FOOTNOTES

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