

PAPER BY HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT CHEDDI JAGAN
TO THE 18TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BLACK STUDIES
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To the distinguished members and guests of the National Council for Black Studies who are gathered here for the 18th Annual Conference and the Second International Conference, I extend a hearty and warm welcome on my own personal behalf and on behalf of the Government and People of Guyana.

We are honoured by your presence among us today and we offer you much goodwill and salute the illustrious and noteworthy personages who have found time to be with us in Guyana.

This meeting will be most beneficial to the Guyanese people which comprise a multi-racial and multi-cultural community and surely will increase the interest of our peoples in the discipline of Black Studies.

We are glad you are here at this time. Guyana is today at an important juncture, a democratic awakening ushered in by the October 1992 free and fair elections. You will be mesmerised by the natural beauty and resources of Guyana: a potential yet to be realised. At the same time, you will enquire, as many have done, including ourselves, why this country and its hardworking people are made to suffer the hardships due to under-development?

The answer to that question, my friends, and to the remedies for our problems lies in part in our own historical development and partly on the developments in the world.

The present phase of global historical development is characterised by several trends which are contradictory. On the one hand, there is tremendous economic development in some parts of the world, where science and technology are revolutionising production, trade, labour and the movement of capital.

The New World Economic Order in the aftermath of the "oil crisis" of the mid-1970s was replaced by a New World Order after the Gulf war. Now, after the end of the Cold War, which brought with it great expectations, there is confusion and convulsions. Thus, on the other hand, there is another trend - a new world disorder, symptoms of which are: widespread human insecurity, human rights violations, racial/ethnic, tribal and religious strife, deteriorating food consumption, hunger and famine, homelessness, crime, illiteracy, disease, narcotics production and trafficking, widening regional inequalities, population explosion, water deficiency, environmental degradation, desertification, population displacement and emigration and over-emphasis on military expenditure.

Scholars, politicians, scientists and laymen have all agreed that the causes behind this contradiction are complex and rooted in historical developments, some as far back as slavery and others as recent as yesterday, so to speak.

CAUSE OF DISORDER

Exploitation and oppression were/are components of class-based socio-economic systems -- slavery, feudalism and capitalism. Consequently, class struggle became an integral part in the fight against exploitation and oppression for national and social liberation and the advancement of humankind.

In the early period of mercantile and competitive capitalism, struggles took various forms :

(1) The Luddite Movement for the destruction of machines in the mistaken belief that they were responsible for workers' displacement and unemployment;

(2) The fight for the "8 hour work, 8 hour leisure, 8 hour rest" day, which led to the Maymarket massacre and the celebration of May Day.

(3) The early attempts to organise trade unions for collective bargaining and the forced exile to Australia of the founders of the trade union movement;

(4) The organisation of a political party on the recognition by the working people that trade union struggle against capitalist exploitation must be supplemented by the capture of state power; thus, the close linkage between the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the British Labour Party;

(5) Call for a new socio-economic order, cooperative socialism, by the humanitarian, but utopian, socialists Saint Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen.

(6) Revolts against plantation slavery (African) and indentureship (Indians, Chinese, Indonesians, Portuguese, etc)

In the period of modern capitalism, the first major cyclical crisis was manifested in the Great Depression of the late 1920's and 1930's. Now, the cyclical crisis is compounded by the structural crisis of modernised production -- cybernation and robotics, computers and robots. This is leading to growing unemployment and increasing poverty. Social inequality -- the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer -- is resulting from the fact that a greater share of the product of capital-intensive growth goes to finance capital for research and technology and means of production. Indeed, the world is now faced with gaps between the rich and the poor in the developed, as well as the developing, countries, and the ever widening gap between the developed and the developing countries¹.

Unemployment has reached 32 million in the OECD countries and nearly 20 million in Europe alone. At one time, a 2-3 per cent unemployment rate was regarded as the norm for developed states; now, it is 4 - 4.5 per cent. In many countries, the rate is double digit.

A new phenomenon is jobless growth : even with modest economic growth, unemployment increases. And linked to unemployment is the evil of inflation: when unemployment is decreased, inflation increases, and vice versa.

In the United States, with the unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent, there are alarm bells about inflation. Consequently, the US Federal Reserve is raising interest rates, so as to slow down the economic growth rate, which in turn will impact adversely on the unemployment rate. Meanwhile, with increasing poverty, the Clinton administration is allocating over US\$1 billion for the homeless. But this, according to the Secretary for Housing, will cater over the next three years for only a third of the homeless -- 200,000 out of an estimated 600,000.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISIS AND RACISM

The cyclical crisis of the Great Depression of the 1930's provided the basis, through the vehicle of demagoguery, racism and violence, for the degeneration and transformation in Europe of liberal capitalism to the extreme forms of authoritarian capitalism. The Jews and communists were made scapegoats for the rise of Adolf Hitler and Hitlerite fascism, masquerading as national socialism (Nazism).

In this period of cyclical and structural crisis, politics is becoming extremely polarised. Once again, racism and violence are raising their ugly heads. Ultra-right, racist National Front practices are gaining ground in France, the United Kingdom, Russia and elsewhere. Racial violence by "skin-heads" and neo-fascists against Turks and Vietnamese in Germany has assumed alarming proportions. In North America, the racist Klu Klux Klan (KKK) are calling for a holy war. In Italy, elements linked to fascist Benito Mussolini now hold cabinet positions in the Italian Government. In East London, Great Britain, the neo-fascists hanker back to the glorious days of the British

Empire and view Black, Brown, Yellow and Coloured peoples as enemies who threaten their existence and should be sent back whence they came.

VIOLENCE IN THE THIRD WORLD

Foreign political, economic and cultural domination brought about attitudes of the "master race", ("master" and "subject") and superiority and inferiority.

In the liberation struggle for national independence, state violence (terrorism) was used to maintain the Old Order. When the subjected peoples answered with revolutionary violence, they were deemed "savages", "terrorists" and "communists". Mahatma Gandhi was called by Winston Churchill "a naked Fakir". All those opposed to Apartheid in South Africa were deemed "communists" under the Suppression of Communism Act and either jailed or deported. Nelson Mandela was deemed a "communist" and a "terrorist" and jailed 27 years for fighting apartheid.

The former South African apartheid regime actively supported counter-revolutionary movements in Southern Africa and elsewhere.

If Africa is today the scene of the greatest violence, its roots are multi-faceted:

- (1) The carving up of Africa by the colonial powers left a legacy of multi-tribal and multi-linguistic states;
- (2) The tribal structure was destroyed and replaced by an undeveloped, dependent capitalism;
- (3) The epicentre of poverty and famine shifted from Asia to Africa; Africa has the vast majority of the 47 Least Developed States;
- (4) The struggle for political power became acute as a result of foreign dependency, tribal loyalties and underdeveloped class formation - too many classes and strata competing for political power. Cold War interventionism also led to violence.

BLACK POWER

The struggle of the Afro-American people against racial discrimination and Jim Crow segregation was greatly facilitated by the fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism, particularly in Africa, and against apartheid in South Africa. US ruling circles aided the African liberation process. President E.D. Roosevelt in keeping with US democratic traditions and its national interest², opposed Winston Churchill who wanted the Atlantic Charter to apply to all the states and peoples. Once the wartime (1942) struggle for independence against racial discrimination and apartheid sharpened in Africa, its impact in the USA was inevitable. American freedom fighters like Paul Robeson and Dr W.E.B. Dubois were closely linked with Caribbean intellectuals like C.L.R. James and George Padmore and politicians like Kwame Nkrumah in the Pan African Congress. The struggle led by Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Oginga Odinga, Sekou Toure, Nelson Mandela and others impacted on the US civil rights movement, leading to the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

The "Black Power" struggle was propelled into centre stage during the Vietnam War, when a mass anti-war movement developed with middle-class America and the students playing a key role. It took various forms -- religious, cultural, ideological and political. The language was militant with the call to arms and the eagerness to "storm heaven". One stream pitted Blacks against Whites, utilising religious (Black Muslims), cultural (Black is beautiful) and ideological differences. Some saw salvation in black capitalism in the ghettos replacing white capitalism (mainly Jewish); others wanted a complete societal transformation through socialism. Another stream saw success not only by grass-roots organisation, but also in common Black/White actions - marches, sit-ins etc. Force -- shootouts, water tanks and cannons, imprisonment -- was used to quell "black power" in particular and anti-war resistance (mainly students) in general.

BLACK POWER IN THE USA AND THE CARIBBEAN

There has been a long historical link between Afro-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. The roots are in slavery and a common cultural heritage. A common bond was the early struggles against chattel slavery -- Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth in the USA; and Cuffy, Damon (British Guiana) Henry Cristophe and Toussaint L'Overture (Haiti), Paul Bogle and Nanny (Jamaica) and others. When they were not engaged in armed combat, their protests took the form of spiritual and calypso singing and jazz, steel-band and reggae music.

It is not strange that at the same time that Afro-American scholar Dr W.E.B. Dubois and athlete/actor/singer Paul Robinson, were witch-hunted and hounded by Senator Mc Carthy's Un-American Activities Committee, Caribbean working class leaders, Jamaican Ferdinand Smith and Trinidadian Claudia Jones were expelled from the United States. CLR James, George Padmore, Dr W.E.B. Dubois and Kwame Nkrumah played prominent roles in the Pan African Congress for Liberation of Africa and the African diaspora.

The modern-day "black power" protest movement in the United States coincided with the Rastafarian movement, essentially an Afro-Caribbean working people's struggle. Both had one thing in common: the fight against white ruling class exploitation and oppression. The cultural religious form was different -- Black Muslims in the USA, Rastafarians in the Caribbean (later Black Muslimeen in Trinidad and Tobago); Afro-hair style in the USA, dreadlocks and reggae in the Caribbean.

RACE/ETHNICITY AND POWER

"Black-power" protests, similar to those in the USA, were witnessed in the Commonwealth Caribbean, mostly in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago with large working class population. In Jamaica, the impetus came from the Rastafarian Movement and the radical student/academic ABENG (signifying an African horn), an off-shoot of the Caribbean-wide New World Group. Dr Walter Rodney provided the militant leadership, for which he was banned re-entry into Jamaica in 1968, after his attendance at a Black Power Conference in Montreal, Canada.

In Trinidad and Tobago, Makaanal Daaga (then Geddes Grainger) and his National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) led a militant "black power" mass street rebellion, which coincided with a breakaway revolt by a section of the army, and led to the near-overthrow of the Dr Eric Williams-led PNM Government in 1970.

In this situation, one prominent Caribbean political personality, Prime Minister, Errol Barrow, asserted that he did not see the necessity of all the clamour about "Black Power", as black people were already in power in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

This brings into consideration race/ethnicity as well as class, ideology and religion; who controls the State (which class or coalition of classes) and what interest(s) the State serves. It must not be forgotten that the State is an instrument of class rule, and the economic base is inter-related and inter-acting with the political, institutional, ideological and cultural superstructure.

Recall that the Bishop of Exeter and other clerics defended the system of chattel Slavery. So today, many defend the status quo.

Malcolm X, I was told in Africa in 1968, had a new experience during his visit to the continent that year: coming from a Black Muslim background and with a strong racial consciousness in the USA, he witnesses Africans from a tribal and class perspective: some African states belonged to the conservative Monrovia Group: others, more progressive/radical, to the Casablanca Group³.

In the Commonwealth Caribbean, the African middle strata wielded political power, what was described as "doctor politics". In the pre-independence period they played an active, progressive

role through the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC). With the Advent of the Cold War, the militant CLC was disbanded and the leaders were coopted. Under their leadership, the state generally in the pre-and post-independence period became the instrument for maintaining the colonial and neo-colonial status quo. The old oligarchy maintained economic power and enriched themselves.

The struggles of the dispossessed were manifested at the grass-roots level by various political, social and cultural organisations. At times, the social-democratic People's National Party (PNP) of Jamaica came into conflict with the foreign vested interests, as with the bauxite levy in 1974, which finally led to the destabilisation of the Manley-led PNP Government in 1980.

The oil crisis of 1973-74 and in quick succession a second oil shock, falling terms of trade and extremely high interest rates and neo-colonial domination under dependent underdeveloped capitalism contributed to mass upheavals in the Caribbean -- Panama, Nicaragua, Curacao, Dominica, Grenada, Suriname and elsewhere. This led to the region being deemed by the Reagan administration as one of the "circles of crisis" in the world and the coming into being of the US Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and the Canadian Preferential Trade scheme for the Commonwealth Caribbean (CARIBCAN). These, however, did not stem the socio-economic crisis during "lost decade" of the 1980's. There is little doubt that this was largely due to the fact that the Commonwealth Caribbean leadership was largely derived from parties of the Caribbean Democratic Union, which were linked to, and were influenced by the neo-liberal monetarist policies of the conservative International Democratic Union, led by President Ronald Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

In Guyana, the PNC regime has been variously described as "black/african", "socialist" and "marxist". It erroneously wrote into the 1980 Constitution that Guyana was at the stage of "transition from capitalism to socialism".

These descriptions and assertions were/are false. Bureaucratic/state capitalism was masquerading as socialism. Actually, under 28 years of PNC administrative dictatorship⁴, the state was generally anti-working people and became an instrument for the enrichment of the political elitist directorate, the PNC neo-comprador bourgeoisie and sections of big business. An analysis from a racial ethnic perspective would reveal that the political directorate was mostly Black/African; the Afro-Guyanese are predominantly working people and practically dominate the state apparatus; the Indo-Guyanese practically dominate the private sector.

Under the PNC regime, the rich became richer and the poor poorer. Bureaucratic/command type of government and bureaucratic/command type of management⁵, a highly centralised state with rigid controls, and an expanded public sector in the economy facilitated political patronage and the emergence of a PNC Black/African neo-comprador bourgeoisie-- contractors, commission agents, etc, who parasitically enriched themselves through the state entities. At the same time, a section of the big bourgeoisie, mainly Indian was served by the state in return for political support for the ruling party⁶.

Lack of democracy, political patronage, extravagance, bribery, corruption, political and racial discrimination not only stagnated the economy, but took a heavy toll on the working people, including the Afro-Guyanese. During the last decade of PNC mismanagement, real wages declined by 50 per cent.

For an appreciation for the economic decline and the deterioration of living standards, it is necessary to understand the class nature of the People's National Congress (PNC).

The PNC was formed after the defeat of the Burnham faction of the PPP at the 1957 elections. It emerged as a coalition of the Burnhamite PPP faction and the United Democratic Party (UDP), a conservative organisation, which had been disastrously defeated at the 1953 elections with only

4 out of 24 seats, as against 18 for the PPP, and formed the Interim Government (1954 - 1957) after the ejection of the PPP from Office.

The class character and historical development of the PNC was no doubt the rationale for the vivid description of L.F.S. Burnham by Arthur Schlesinger Jr and the Anglo-American establishment. In his book, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, he noted: "Thus far [in May 1962] our policy was based on the assumption that Forbes Burnham was, as the British described him, an opportunist, racist and demagogue intent only on personal power".

STRUGGLE, DEMOCRACY AND STATE POWER

Decline in living standards, oppression and suppression laid the basis for a united mass movement and the struggle for free and fair elections, the restoration of democracy and the gaining of state power.

The Struggle of the multi-racial /ethnic character took many forms: trade union/industrial, religious, political.

In 1977, a four-union movement developed for bread and justice, embracing two unions in the sugar industry with predominantly Indo-Guyanese workers and the urban Clerical and commercial Workers Union and the University Workers Union, mainly Afro-Guyanese. Later, the four unions were joined by the two bauxite unions, also mainly Afro-Guyanese. So militant had the struggle advanced that the six-union movement, supported by the Public Service Union defeated in a secret vote, even with a minority of delegates, the PNC-backed candidate for President at the 1984 TUC Annual Conference.

At the religious level, the Afro-Guyanese Anglican Bishop, Randolph George, and the Indo-Guyanese Catholic Bishop Benedict Singh, with their "Bishops' Manifesto" and other actions played a big role in attaining free and fair elections.

Five major opposition parties, in a multi-racial/ethnic alliance, the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy, fought vigorously inside and outside Guyana for the restoration of democracy.

The united mass struggle succeeded in ousting the PNC from power and brought the PPP/CIVIC into government in October 1992, coincidentally on the same date 39 years earlier when the PPP, after attaining national, racial/ethnic and working class unity, had been forcibly removed from government.

CHANGE, DIVERSITY AND UNITY

In today's world of disorder, change is vital. But for change to be meaningful, certain basic pre-requisites must be in place --- democracy, human rights and freedom, good governance, economic growth, social justice and eco-justice.

Democracy must be all-embracing -- political, economic/industrial and social. It should be representative and participatory, and people-oriented and must ensure the fullest enjoyment of all freedoms.

Democracy and good governance are essential for economic growth. But to ensure that economic growth leads to human development, the working class and the revolutionary democrats (sections of the petty-bourgeois middle -class) must exercise the balance of power in the social contract between the state, capital and labour. Without this, it will not be possible to attain social justice and eco-justice.

The PPP/CIVIC is such an alliance. The PPP emerged in 1950, out of the 1946 Political Affairs Committee (PAC), as a broad-based national and social liberation Movement. In the 1970's, it was transformed into a working class party. It contested and won 3 consecutive elections in 1953, 1957 and 1961, and would have won in the 1964 elections had the voting system not been changed from

the traditional first-past-the-post constituency system to the list system of proportional representation (Arthur Schlesinger Jr, in April 1990 in New York City at the editorial office of the NATION Magazine, expressed his regrets for recommending the change to President John F. Kennedy). After failure to reach an accommodation with the PNC for a political solution, and later with the four other PCD parties for a united electoral front, the PPP contested the 1992 election as the PPP/CIVIC, a broad-based alliance of all classes and strata. The CIVIC component represented prominent individuals, who were not aligned to any political party, and were drawn from academic, professional, religious and business communities. The PPP/CIVIC alliance thus provided racial/ethnic, class and ideological balance and constituted a government of national unity. Because of its commitment to a democratic culture, good governance and to meeting the Guyanese people's basic needs, and ensuring the fullest employment of their civil and political, as well as their economic, social and cultural rights, it is possible to attain racial/ethnic harmony and cooperation.

It is imperative in analysing any multi-racial/ethnic, multi-cultural society to note concrete peculiarities. For example, though Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago have many similarities, there are many differences in terms of political/ideological/societal development.

In Guyana, because of the strong foreign monopoly domination by the sugar plantocracy, the class struggle was more intense. And although the two major racial/ethnic groups are culturally different, they are not uni-class and class-different as formerly in the colonial period in East Africa. Both groups are largely made up of working people. As such, the PPP/CIVIC, with its working class sympathy and policies oriented to material and cultural fulfillment, can lay the foundation for unity in diversity.

This will be achieved because the PPP/CIVIC has not only pronounced firmly against all forms of racial/ethnic discrimination, but has also set up a Task Force under the Distinguished Anglican Bishop Randolph George to lay the basis for a Race Relations Act and Race Relations Commission. This is intended also to assuage fears of racial insecurity.

Objectively, conditions for unity will mature, not only because of the nature of the PPP/CIVIC Government, but also because the heavy arm of the PNC-controlled state can no longer bribe and coerce Afro-Guyanese to remain aligned to the PNC.

And within the new developing situation, a new cultural awakening is evolving on the basis of multi-culturalism, diversity and unity.

October 5, 1992 marked a new beginning, a new chapter to recreate the national, racial/ethnic and working people's unity which had been attained but shattered by force in 1953. Today fortunately, we do not have the McCarthyite witch-hunting and the anti-communist hysteria which characterised the two periods we had been in government in the 1950's and early 1960's. And, on the positive side of today's disorder is the democratisation wave sweeping the world, which has catapulted yesterday's so-called terrorist Nelson Mandela from prison to today's hero as President of a Government of National Unity of South Africa.

We are optimistic that while the world situation remains volatile, and developing nations face huge problems of under-development, mankind will survive and triumph. The present situation calls for global consensus for in an inter-dependent world, there must be equality and justice. The present situation offers an option for positive developments which can and must produce the impetus for radical reforms leading to a new socio-economic order and a sane, safe and just world. There is need for a New, Global Humanitarian Order where the rights of all people must be recognised and respected so as to avoid the pitfalls of the past which led to years of turmoil and bloodshed.

I wish this conference every success. You have a great role to play in fashioning a new reality. It is with great pleasure that I now declare this Conference open.

NOTES

1. Twenty per cent of the people in the North have incomes 150 times greater than those of the corresponding 20 per cent of the people in the South.
2. USA, emerging as the greatest world economic power during and after World War II, advocated free trade and saw through independent states an end to trading blocs, such as the British imperial preferential trading system.
3. The Monrovia Groups merged with the Casablanca Group to form the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).
4. A Canadian Parliamentary Human Rights Committee described the PNC as an administrative dictatorship clothed in the vestments of democracy.
5. Mikhail Gorbachev credited economic stagnation in the former Soviet Union to bureaucratic/command type of government and bureaucratic/command type management.
6. At the 1992 elections, a group of wealthy businessmen, mainly Indo-Guyanese, formed a Committee for the Re-election of President [Desmond Hoyte] (CREEP) and raised \$35 million for his campaign.
7. The PPP was split in 1955, after the Churchill government had by armed force liquidated the PPP government and suspended the Constitution. The Robertson Commission in 1954 white-washed the British gunboat action and divided the PPP leadership into an "extremist/communist" faction led by Cheddi Jagan and a "moderate/socialist" faction led by L.F.S. Burnham.
8. The General Secretary of the UDP was also the General Secretary of the League of Coloured People (LCP), which overseas was for all non-white peoples, but in British Guiana was Afro-Guyanese and in sharp competition under petty-bourgeois leadership with the East Indian Association (EIA).
9. The PPP emerged in 1950, out of the 1946 Political Affairs Committee (PAC), as a broad-based national and social liberation movement. In the 1970's it was transformed into a working class party. It contested and won 3 consecutive elections in 1953, 1957 and 1961, and would have won the 1964 elections had the voting system not been changed from the traditional first-past-the-post constituency system to the list system of proportional representation (Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in April 1990 in New York City at the editorial office of the NATION magazine, expressed his regrets for recommending the change to President John F. Kennedy, which was later imposed by the British Government). After failure to reach an accommodation with the PNC for a political solution,

and later with the four other PCD parties for a united electoral front, the PPP contested the 1992 elections as the PPP/Civic, a broad-based alliance of all classes and strata. The Civic component represented prominent individuals, who were not aligned to any political party, and were drawn from the academic, professional, religious and business communities. The PPP/Civic alliance thus constituted a government of national unity and provided racial/ethnic, class and ideological balance.

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