

At this stage of our lives, it's time to come clean Hammie

Mar 30, 2023 [Letters](#) Kaieture News

Dear Editor,

A good friend of mine sent me a video clip of Mr. Hamilton Green attacking a billboard erected on the East Bank hailing Dr. Jagan as the Father of the Nation. In that video, Mr. Green gave several reasons for his positions. From the outset, let me say almost all the points he made were distorted and some were downright untrue. The first point he made was that the PPP government in June 1953 did not go to meet the Queen in Jamaica after her coronation. Mr. Green called it a mistake. Perhaps it was.

However, it was not Dr. Jagan's alone that held that position. Burnham who was then the Chairman of the PPP was of that view as well. In fact, in that period Mr. Burnham used to describe himself as the only Marxist in the PPP. Other leaders of the PPP who took that position were Martin Carter, Rory Westmass, Sydney King among others. They felt that it was enough that the colony was represented in London at the crowning.

To now blame Dr. Jagan alone for that decision is incorrect by a long shot. That was a collective decision.

The other "mistake" he spoke about was the solidarity given by the PPP to Julius and Ethal Rosenberg who were sentenced to death in the US for allegedly spying for the Soviet Union. Here again Mr. Green is very misleading. It is true that the PPP government passed a motion in the Legislative Assembly calling on the President of the USA to exercise clemency for them. At that time, people all over the world felt it was persecution and that the couple was innocent. It was at a time when Mc McCarthyism was rampant in the US and many people, Communist and non-communists were being persecuted, these included Paul Roberson, and the famous film writer Trumbo. Many innocent people were destroyed by the extremism of Senator McCarthy.

So, the PPP was not alone in calling for clemency for them, it was on the side of progressive people the world over demanding this and giving solidarity to the couple. This included the Pope! How this was a mistake is a mystery! Indeed, it was an act of humanism and solidarity. He then accused Dr. Jagan of not joining the Non-Align Movement, suggesting that Jagan was hostile to it and that he had an opportunity to join and did not. That is totally untrue. Cheddi Jagan held the Non-Aligned Movement and its founders in very high esteem. But how could the country join that movement when we were (a) still a colony and (b) even if it was possible for a colony to join the NAM, the PPP was not in office in 1955, the constitution having been suspended in 1953. So, Mr. Green is creating his own circumstances and then use that to criticize Dr. Jagan. This is certainly an attempt to deliberately mislead people.

It is true that it was Mr. Burnham who established the Non-Aligned Park in Georgetown in the mid-1970s. The PPP supported it fully. This was when Burnham was working to change his image as a pro-colonial and pro-imperialist for his role from 1955 to 1970. If, according to Green, Burnham was so enamoured with the NAM, why it took him so long after Independence to join that movement?

Let me add that Dr. Jagan's position international relations of an independent Guyana was known from the inception. He reiterated this in an interview he gave in January 1957. In an answer to a question on foreign policy he said, "...We would pursue a policy of strict neutrality and friendliness to all nations ...". Later in the 1960's, he even said he was ready to sign such a neutrality pact as the Austrian model. He was opposed to having any foreign military base here.

The other distraction Green tried to pass off is that Kennedy asked Jagan if he was a Communist and Jagan could not answer. Where he got that from is a total mystery. This is sheer nonsense. He spoke about Cheddi's position on the West Indian Federation. Let me say that the PPP's position on the Federation was decided by the party from its inception. That was when Burnham was the Chairman of the PPP. That position was that a PPP government would be supportive of Federation if the region became independent or at a minimum enjoyed internal self-government. It also stated that before joining a referendum would be held.

That position of the PPP came out of a meeting of the Caribbean Labour Congress which was held in the late 1940's and attended by the English-speaking countries. The minimum conditions were never met when the Federation was formed therefore the West Indian Federation was a glorified crown colony. That is what the PPP was opposed to. Incidentally, the PPP was not alone. The British was trying to establish federations in various regions of Africa (West Africa, etc.) and they were rejected by African leaders for the same reasons as the PPP did. They refused to be glorified crown colonies to please the colonisers and to make it easier for London to subjugate the colonies.

Cheddi Jagan should be praised for saving the integrity of the region by the PPP's position. The progressive forces in the region always rejected such a status. If Mr. Green did his homework he would have known that the government of Belize fell because the leading Party there changed its position on the Federation. Opposition in many of the Caribbean islands was strong, Jamaica is one example.

Hamilton Green then moved to talk about Cheddi's position on the independence conference in London in 1963. What he failed to say is that Burnham's role was less than honourable. I am being kind here. Burnham changed his position constantly on Independence. From 1950 to 1955 while in the PPP, he was a strong advocate for Independence. There were no differences between him and Dr. Jagan in that period. He began to shift in the late 1950s. By 1960, at the first Independence talks, he dropped the demand for independence and advocated Internal self-government instead.

In the run-up to the 1961 elections, he again called for independence. In fact, it was on this issue that he and Sydney King fell out.

He agreed that whichever party won the 1961 elections would lead the country to Independence. He was confident of victory because of his collaboration with the British colonial masters and he was aware that the boundaries were being changed to give the PNC a win. Things did not go accordingly to his and the British plan. When the PNC lost those elections, he switched again. This time, he aligned himself with Bookers (Sir Anthony Tusker who was the first person to call for Proportional Representation), the British and by then the Americans. Those forces were determined not to grant real independence to Guyana. Any "independent" state had to be neo-colonial. Burnham was already working with the colonial power and the US to stop Independence.

At the talks in London, Burnham and the United Force began to demand Proportional Representation, a campaign they began immediately after the 1961 polls. Remember PR of CR? According to Jane Sillery who wrote her doctoral thesis on US foreign policy and B.G, Burnham was told by the Americans not to make any compromise with Jagan. They assured him that the British would have given him all he wanted. That is why he behaved the way he did, even rejecting Cheddi's 50% offer of the cabinet. Now Hamilton Green, like others, are criticising Dr. Jagan for signing the agreement to allow Sandy to arbitrate because Burnham had refused to compromise, then he preferred working with US and the UN against the PPP. What is forgotten in all of this is that both Burnham and D'Aguiar signed the same document.

Green and some anti-Jaganites like to present this as Cheddi Jagan being out-smarted. This was not so. Cheddi Jagan was betrayed.

What considerations Dr. Jagan must have had when he signed that document?

1. In 1962 when Trinidad and Tobago was going towards Independence, PR was proposed as the electoral system. The British rejected it. They agreed with Dr. Eric Williams that PR would balkanize T&T and entrench racism in the society.
2. The situation described by Mr. Green i.e the PPP had 20 of the 35 seats with less than 50% of the popular votes was the same situation that existed in the UK in that period. The Conservative Party had the majority of seats with less than 50% of the votes. Moreover, the British rejected PR for all the colonies in the Commonwealth.
3. On the question of voting at 18, that was always the position of the PPP. Moreover, Barbados had passed a bill for voting at 18 in its colonial parliament so it was reasonable for Dr. Jagan to assume that the British would grant that.

Dr. Jagan obviously thought that even if the British conceded PR to the opposition, it would give him voting at 18. He did not expect such a great betrayal from the "honourable gentlemen". He maybe did not want to believe that his once "Marxist" colleague, Burnham, would have descended so low as to rob the people of this country of real substance of independence. Mr. Green then went on to deliberately and dishonestly misrepresented what that Dr. Jagan said when he realised the extent of the betrayal. Green misquoted Jagan as saying that he would create a "Hurricane of Violence", which is totally untrue. What he did say was that he would have begun a "Hurricane of Protests". This is totally different.

Mr. Green seems still to be in alliance with the colonial masters who used that statement to violently attack the PPP in 1964. It was an excuse they created to unleash violence against the PPP. Hammie is still steeped in the colonial version of events. He then spoke about the PPP boycotting the 1965 Independence Conference. Well, it is important to understand why.

Firstly, many PPP leaders were still in detention for almost two years without trial and the colony was under a state of emergency. Secondly, the Burnham led PNC government just at the time of the conference in 1965 arrested and detained other PPP leaders including Comrade Cedric Vernon Nunes former Minister of Education in the 1961 to 1964 PPP government. They refused to release the political prisoners and to lift the State of Emergency! The PNC working in alliance with the colonial powers were making it impossible for the PPP to attend.

The British and PNC refused to release them or to end the State of Emergency, yet the PPP did not oppose Independence. It welcomed it but, began to wage a fight for real freedom which was won on October 5, 1992. It is apposite to recall that Guyana was the only country in the Commonwealth which the British granted Independence with a state of emergency in place.

Finally, Mr. Green credited Mr. Burnham for granting Muslims and Hindus holiday in 1965. That is not the whole truth.

During the PPP term in office in 1964, a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was set-up to look at holidays. Those holidays came as a recommendation of that body. I suspect that even if Mr. Burnham wanted to reject them, the British would have overruled him to save their own faces due to the racial division, they encouraged and were being criticized for by many people in various parts of

the world. Mr. Green and other of his ilk have a habit of lifting dishonesty and treachery and trying to make them virtues. Instead of apologising for his role and that of his party in their betrayal of the independence movement in this country, he objectively continues to defend the colonialist role and his own party collaborationist position.

At this stage of our lives, it's time to come clean Hammie!

Regards,
Donald Ramotar
Former President of Guyana