

BRITISH GUIANA—OUR CASE

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B RITISH troops have occupied Guiana. The Constitution has been suspended. Elected Ministers have been dismissed. The Legislature has been prorogued. Meetings are banned. Police are raiding scores of homes. The Governor is virtual dictator.

What brought about this crisis? Officialdom alleges a Communist plot to create disorder and overthrow government, but no evidence is produced.

Strangely enough our Party has done little else in its brief four-month period in ministerial office than attempt to implement its election manifesto of April, 1953, which stated:

We intend to amend all existing laws and regulations which restrict the civil liberties of the people such as banning of individuals, books and films.

We shall introduce laws making it a crime to discriminate against any person or persons on account of race or religion.

We shall guarantee freedom of press, worship, speech, assembly and association as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Other items in the programme were:

Laws to protect the trade unions, including repeal of the Trade Disputes (Essential Services) Ordinance and a measure based on the U.S. Labour Relations Act; land reform, land settlement, security of tenure for farmers and provisions for agricultural loans; better control of the expenditure of the Public Works Department and enquiry into its administration; equal educational opportunities for all, with nursery schools and secondary education scholarships; low rental housing schemes; reorganisation of medical services; social insurance measures; reform of local government; Workmen's Compensation to cover industrial diseases; increase of direct taxes and reduction of indirect taxes; establishment of subsidiary industries; speedier implementation of the Factories Ordinance; and centrally planned drainage and irrigation.

We passed a Bill in the House to repeal a fascist law prohibiting importation and distribution of progressive literature. We opened doors to everyone by lifting certain bans. We passed legislation

forcing employers to recognise for collective bargaining trade unions with majority support.* We increased loans to farmers. We passed an amendment to the security of tenure for rice farmers ordinance in order to help farmers during drought. We campaigned to remove church control of schools. We tightened up on public works expenditure, reducing votes in the bloated estimates. We curtailed unnecessary house building for senior government officials. We began a revision of fees of government doctors in order to help the poor. We were initiating legislation to reform local government by introducing adult suffrage and abolishing the system of nominated persons. We advocated jobs for local men in the police force and in other categories. We refused to send delegates to meet the Queen in Jamaica.

We increased the royalty on the proposed hydroelectric station. We were preparing an increase of royalties and of taxation of natural mineral resources. We refused to grant leases of crown lands to landlords already possessing large holdings.

We sent a delegate to Surinam to secure rights for Guianese fishermen in Dutch Guiana waters. We increased the number of scholarships known as People's Scholarships. We refused payment to the members of the State Council. We introduced legislation to suspend the Essential Services Act with reference to the right to strike; and for control of money lenders. We established committees to investigate the domestic workers' problem, the revision of the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance and for machine stations for farmers. We appointed ordinary people to Government boards and committees.

We kept in close contact with our people and visited the countryside regularly, informing them of our activities and pointing out the constitutional checks. As these Constitutional brakes became more evident we exposed them one by one. At the same time as we occupied ourselves almost fully with local problems, we never lost sight of international problems: we pledged solidarity with the struggles of other colonial peoples, and with the movement to end

*The Sugar Producers' Association had refused to recognise the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union, which had the full confidence of the workers as evinced in the three-and-a-half weeks complete shut-down of the sugar industry that began on August 30. Yet the Sugar Producers' Association continued to recognise the Man-Power Citizens' Association, a company union which has long lost the confidence of the sugar workers. On September 24 the Minister of Labour, introducing a Labour Relations Bill to compel employers to recognise a trade union holding a majority of members in a given industry, sought to carry it through its three readings as a matter of urgency and for this moved suspension of standing orders. The Speaker (nominated not elected) refused although it is proved that this suspension is valid, if the consent of the House were given (and it was clear that the House would consent, since the People's Progressive Party had an obvious majority). The P.P.P. members left the House in protest against this ruling.

all wars: and we passed a resolution in the House protesting about the Rosenberg case.

We refused to fraternise with the Governor and the officials. Our Ministers refused to play ball in secret meetings of the Executive Council and used their voting strength to fulfil Party pledges. Our Ministers refused to relinquish old trade union affiliations and continued as active trade unionists. We never forgot the struggle was not only one of day to day administration but of building the national liberation movement. We prepared the minds of people for that struggle by educating them in Party groups. We encouraged reading and discussion. Party membership increased two-fold and organised groups reached one hundred. We were helping little people to get a square deal in a thousand and one grievances. They were learning in only four months that People's Progressive Party government meant more equality of opportunity for the smaller man.

Our tremendous growth of strength and confidence from the Guianese, even to winning over civil servants and police to the Party, frightened the United Kingdom officials who saw their power waning. Despite official efforts at sabotage and the Governor's tricks of arranging the agenda of the Executive Council and postponing matters—also his frenzied visits around the country to gather personal support—we were still on the up-grade. The official element saw clearly that, despite all their efforts to split the Party and to undermine its influence and its popularity, and keeping Ministers tied to files, encouraging them to lose contact with the masses—the people were with us. The officials quickly learned that we were not of the same calibre as Gomez of Trinidad and Adams of Barbados and Bustamente of Jamaica. We would not forsake our principles upon receipt of high salaries and social prestige. Therefore in four months they were able to see that we remained what we were when we went to the electorate in April. There was no other way for them to remove the threat of final success of our movement for self government and eventual national independence but to use the most drastic means possible. They brought in the British Army to re-establish Colonial Office supremacy in Guiana.

Talk of a Communist coup and uprisings is more fantastic than Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Not one of the Party leaders had gone so far as to even think of guns and bombs. What need was there for terrorism when we were sailing smoothly and constitutional changes were fast approaching? Communism was made the

bogey to re-establish the old order of graft, corruption, favouritism and soft jobs for civil servants deposed from India and Palestine.

Since October 9, the Party has called upon the Guianese to resist in every possible way the British action—in general strike, non-co-operation and non-violence. The people have contributed generously to a fund to send delegates abroad. There is no doubt that the tempers of workers have been aroused by police raids on leaders' houses and by the shocking refusal of governmental facilities for the departure abroad of Burnham and Jagan.

The present situation has only succeeded in making the picture of imperialism sharper in the minds of the masses who now see more clearly than a hundred lectures could tell what British colonialism means. They know too that this is an effort to break up forever their beloved Party and are united in their stand behind the movement.

We call upon the great freedom-loving Labour Movement of Britain to help us.

Without your help our struggle and the struggle of all colonial peoples for better living conditions and democratic government is in jeopardy. This blow is meant to strike fear in the hearts of all progressives abroad.

We have right on our side. We have done nothing but struggle honestly on behalf of thousands of poverty-stricken Guianese.

Our case rests with the good people of Britain.

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