

TOWARDS FREEDOM IN GUIANA

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I N early October the World was startled by the usual events which occurred in the hitherto almost unknown British colony on the South American mainland—British Guiana. In April 1953 the People's Progressive Party had won by a landslide victory the majority of seats in the House of Assembly, giving them six ministerial portfolios and a majority on the Executive Council. Even with this numerical majority, the Constitution was so designed that their power was limited—which is typical of all colonial constitutions. From June until the British troops arrived in October and the constitution was suspended, the Party ministers were in office, diligently learning their tasks and making every effort to implement the election manifesto. Behind them were the broad masses of Guianese who had been subjected for over a century by their colonial oppressors and who looked to the Party to lead them forward to freedom and a better life.

The Government officials, backed by Big Business and the sugar planters were afraid of this popularly elected labour majority and obviously were not prepared to permit even the mildest of reforms. In the U.S.A. a hysterical campaign against "Communism in the Caribbean" began. There is no doubt that certain influences from the State Department assisted in bringing about the suspension of the constitution. A "plot" was concocted, the wild dream of the Colonial Office, which felt that harsh action must be taken to remove the limited powers of the peo-



A challenge to Imperialism

ple's representatives. Troops were rushed to British Guiana and an Emergency Law declared. The Colonial Office, to justify its actions, produced a White Paper full of vague allegations and a specific charge of a "fire plot" by some of the Ministers, to burn the city. When the troops arrived, they landed with guns in hand, ready for action. But strangely, there was no need for guns, or for that matter, for troops everything was quiet in Guiana. There was no violence, no fighting and certainly no incendiarism. Everyone, including the dozens of foreign newspaper correspondents, were surprised. Was this the "uprising" that the P.P.P. had planned to take over the country? Booked to leave the Colony two days after the sudden arrival of the troops were three Party Ministers. The Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce and

Local Government and Social Welfare had been invited to trade talks in Brazil. The Minister of Health and Housing was leaving to attend a housing conference in Puerto Rico.

Despite the challenge by Party leaders to charge them if they had planned incendiarism, the Colonial Office had to admit that they could lay no charges. The Witnesses were afraid to come forward, they said. This statement was made after the landing of troops, which certainly could offer protection to a handful of witnesses.

The elected Ministers and Members of the House of Assembly were deposed from office and the Governor ruled as virtual dictator. Every effort was made to prevent the two party leaders—Prime Minister Dr. Jagan and Party Chairman, Mr. Burnham, from leaving for England to present their case. Eventually the leaders left, having to charter a special plane to carry them to Surinam to make overseas plane connections. Their travels in England and India have been given some publicity, so it is not necessary to deal with that here.

The week after their departure, five Party members including Sydney King, former Minister of Communications, were detained by the Governor's orders under the Emergency regulations. They were held for eightyone days at Atkinson Field, former U.S. air base. On two occasions they showed their protest by going on hunger-strike. The Governor appointed a Committee to hear causes why they should not be detained. The charges, hearings and reports were to be secret and the composition of the Committee was fully balanced against the Party. Four of the five detained men boycotted this committee, refusing to go before it. In the meantime, the Party began a campaign for their release in which thousands of signature cards demanding their freedom were sent to the Governor. Le-

gal action was taken whereby a writ of Habeas Corpus was filed on behalf of Sydney King. An application to summon the Governor was refused by the Judge. The appeal against this refusal was filed the day prior to the release of the detainees. A few minutes after their release, four were handed new orders from the Governor, restricting their movements to the area of their residence. The Party's Secretary, Ramkarran, former Member of the House of Assembly, Ramsarran and Eric Huntley were served with similar orders. All eight must report to the police twice weekly.

Under the Emergency Orders which give the Governor the widest of powers, hundreds of private homes were raided without warrants. These raids continue to the present with three homes being searched last week along with one raid on the Party's headquarters and two raids on the Party's New Amsterdam office. Cars are stopped and searched at any place and at any time. The printing establishment which does work for the Party has been raided many times and Party's newspaper "Thunder" has been held up and leaflets seized. A few days before he was detained Poet Martin Carter had given his latest work "Six Poems of Resistance" to a printer. These were seized by Police and the printing of them prevented.

The Emergency Orders prohibit the meeting of more than five persons without Police permission. The Police have refused to grant permission to the P.P.P for any meetings other than those of its Executive Committee, whilst the opposing political party which has the blessings of all anti-P.P.P. forces encounters no hinderances. In Buxton Village, a stronghold of the Party which recently won a 100 per cent victory in its local Government elections, the village chairman received permission to hold a public meeting to discuss village matters. Shortly after

the meeting began the Police came with batons and dispersed the gathering. On another occasion, the P.P.P. received permission for a meeting of its deposed Parliamentary group. A brief announcement in the press drew a crowd of over 5,000 which lined the streets to witness and cheer the arrival of their former representatives. Lorry loads of baton police arrived and the Superintendent of Police informed the Parliamentary group in session that if they did not disperse immediately, as much force as necessary would be used.

Immediately after the suspension of the Constitution, the Party embarked upon a campaign of non-cooperation. A general strike was called and this was supported by the majority of sugar workers. The Party thence called for a boycott of the Water Street stores, which include the major commercial interests opposed to the Party and the octopus Bookers Co., which practically controls the economy of the British Guiana (B.G. is often called "Bookers Guiana"). This boycott along with the boycott on Coca-Cola (Coca-Cola lorries transported troops to Georgetown) were effective and still continue. In early Dec. the Party issued a statement calling for decreased spending at Christmas and a curtailment of festivities. The slogan 'No Constitution, No Christmas' proved effective. The Party also called a boycott against the "Daily Argosy" which is the most venomous of the anti-P.P.P. newspapers.

Two Party members, Nasrudeen, a sugar worker and Fred Bowman, deposed member of the House of Assembly and former sugar worker have been charged with sedition. Their cases will come before Supreme Court on March 1st. Mr. D. N. Pritt, Q.C. will represent them.

Under the Emergency Orders three organisations have been proscribed—The Pioneer Youth League, The Damerara Youth Rally and The

B. G. Peace Committee. The Governor has also listed several publications which are now banned.

At the end of December, the Governor announced the composition of the nominated Interim Government which will continue until elections are permitted. The seven man Executive Council includes three business men, two persons who were defeated in the last elections (one lost his deposit), the former Financial Secretary and the leader of the opposition in the deposed House of Assembly. The 24 man Legislative Council includes the Manager of the Sugar Producers' Association, the directors of several companies, five defeated candidates (four of whom lost their deposits) two civil servants and the members of the opposition of the deposed House. Sitting on the Executive Council and Legislative Council are the Chief Secretary, the Attorney General and the Financial Secretary. This puppet government has replaced the same influences which controlled the country prior to the PPP victory. It has met with such disfavour that it has actually thrown into the camp of the PPP persons who were hitherto neutral or against it. The Party has called for non-cooperation with the Interim Government. The Governor is making every effort to put his new government in a favourable position and recently went to the U.K. to seek a substantial loan for the Colony. This Dr. Jagan termed "national bribery."

The Colonial office appointed a three-men Commission to examine and report on a new constitution for British Guiana. The personnel and the terms of reference were considered by the Party to be highly unsatisfactory and the proceedings have been boycotted. This boycott has received harsh criticism from the press and the official section, but has proved very effective in teaching the people that the Commission is a farce, and can offer no

solution to the rape of the people's rights.

Despite the many efforts to restrict and destroy the PPP, the Party has gathered tremendous support from the people who declare that they will stand by their Party through the thick and thin. This was demonstrated in the recent Local Government elections when the Party won the majority of seats in most of the Village Councils. The Party Fighting Fund has received great support from the people and this has helped to give the necessary financial assistance to keep the Party functioning.

The tremendous support which the Party maintains was demonstrated visibly on the return to the country of its leaders—Dr. Jagan

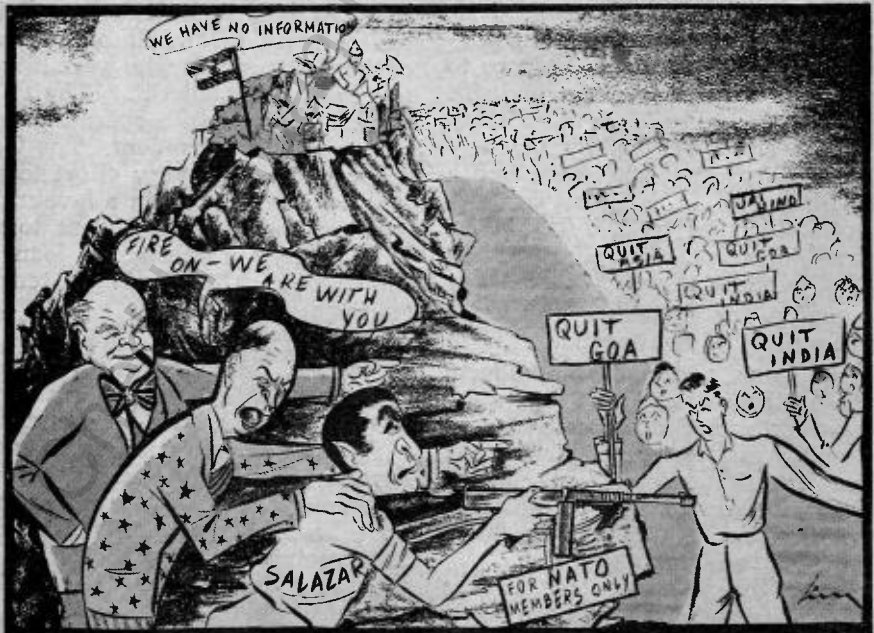
and Mr. Burnham. The greatest demonstration ever seen in British Guiana, was held on the night of their return with practically every rural resident in the 26 miles stretch between the airport and Georgetown turning out to welcome them. In the city, the crowd, which lined the streets despite the Emergency Orders, was impossible to estimate.

The immediate demands of the Party include the termination of the Emergency Orders, the end of the military occupation and early democratic elections. National Independence is its goal.

We know that all freedom loving people the world over will join in our demands for the return of our rights and the end of despotism in our country.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

—Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*.



A Strange Alliance At Work....!