

Memorandum Given by the Hon. J. J. Jagan
Minister for Home Affairs to Mr. Elliott Harrison
& Mr. P. B. Gendron (29/4/64)

Q. What is the purpose of your present visit to London?

A. I came here to reiterate to the British Government our objections to the changes which they are making in our constitution. I advised them that the direction in which the situation in British Guiana is now going is bound to lead to trouble. We have also raised objections to the system of registration of voters recently introduced which will greatly reduce the number of persons registered to vote in the next general elections.

Q. What are your objections to the constitutional changes?

A. The British Government has made three Orders in Council by which it is intended to take away several functions which are normally performed by the elected government. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs, of which I am at present in charge, had under the existing constitution dealt with registration of voters; this is now taken over by the Governor; he is also able to requisition funds directly from the Treasury, which is not in accordance with constitutional practice. Then, as you know, the British Government intends to hold fresh elections on the basis of proportional representation. Our Party, the Peoples Progressive Party, has won three elections under the first-past-the-post system. Because the opposition plus interests opposed to our policy of Socialism have sought to defeat us, this new electoral system has been introduced with one aim - getting rid of the P.P.P. In the 1957 and 1961 elections in B.G., the constituency boundaries were jerrymandered against us. Now they are jerrymandered the whole electoral process.

Q. If the election is held under the proportional representation system, will the Peoples Progressive Party win it?

A. Like most elections, it is difficult to forecast results. However, it is conceded that the PPP will come out as the largest single party. The Tories by the amended constitution are encouraging a multiplicity of splinter parties, but I am quite certain my Party will emerge as the largest single party.

Q. You have been described by some British M.Ps. as "a charming, clever, ruthless communist". Do you agree?

A. I have never belonged to a Communist Party; I have never held a Communist Party card. I don't know if I could call myself "charming and clever", but if others care to, it's quite all right with me.

Q. Is it true that the P.P.P. is an Indian party?

A. So many slanders have been said about the PPP that it is the party of the East Indians. This is totally untrue. The PPP is the only genuine multi-racial party in B.G. and is made up of members of all races in the cabinet, parliamentary group, General Council, constituency bodies, groups, etc. For example, if you examine the list of ~~some~~ candidates put up by the PPP at the last general elections, you will find that we had 12 Negroes, 13 East Indians, 3 Portuguese and one candidate of mixed (half Negro, half Indian) origin.

Q. How far was the American Central Intelligence Agency behind the strike of Feb. 1962, as is often alleged?

A. The American columnist, Brew Pearson, said in an article published in March 22, 1964 that the general strike was "secretly inspired by a combination of the

C.I.A. and British Intelligence".

Q. What was the reaction of the Labour leaders to your talks with them?

A. The Labour Party in general has been non-committal on the issue of B.G. I would have preferred if they could have been more outspoken like Fenner Borckway and Jennie Lee in the debate in the House. It is, however, reassuring to find that there are people in the Labour Party who genuinely seek a solution to these problems. It is hoped that a solution will be proposed for the British Guiana question ~~in xxx~~ which will make the situation less explosive.

Q. What was the reaction of Mr. Duncan Sandys to your mission?

A. He has been inflexible in his whole approach to the B.G. problem ~~and I really do not think~~ It is obvious that the Americans are exerting a tremendous pressure on the British Government.

Q. Do you (PPP) feel isolated in your present situation?

A. No. We have many friends all over the world and in particular from the newly independent countries which have great sympathy for our cause, having gone through it all themselves.

Q. Are you optimistic about the future?

A. I am always optimistic; the struggle for freedom always goes on; we may encounter many difficulties, but we are not afraid of the struggle and we are prepared for it. History is on our side.

Q. Has this tremendous political strain affected your personal relations with your husband?

A. Not at all. I sometimes differ with him, as one often does with one's political colleagues, but Cheddi Jagan is, in many ways a remarkable man; he never imposed his views on others.

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I consider that the real issue was exposed, perhaps inadvertently, by Mr. Iain Macleod, a former Colonial secretary, when he said - "There is an irony which we all recognise in the fact of America urging us all over the world towards colonial freedom except when it approaches her own doorstep. When I was last in America, in May and June of last year, I discussed with many people, including President Kennedy, this particular question which weighs anxiously on their minds".

Q. In what way have the Americans influenced your situation?

A. Mr. Drew Pearson, U.S. journalist, in an article published on March 22, 1964 wrote - "It wasn't in the communique issued by the U.S. and England after the Kennedy-Macmillan meeting, but the main thing they agreed on was the the British would refuse to grant independence to Guiana because of the general strike against pro-communist Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan.

That strike was secretly inspired by a combination of U.S. Central Intelligence Agency money and British intelligence. It gave London the excuse it wanted. British Guiana has not yet received its independence and another communist government at the bottom of the one-time American lake has been temporarily stopped".

In addition, the Americans have been corrupting our trade unionists by immense bribes and the regular remittances of cash and to a large extent diverting them from the real struggle for better wages and conditions from our own local capitalists and foreign firms which operate in B.G.

Q. What do you think of the British Government's introduction of proportional representation?

A. I could think of a lot of dirty words for it but I will stick to the words used in Parliament during the debate. Mr. Macleod referred to their proposals as being "highly unusual" and Mr. James Griffiths said that it was a "system for a sophisticated electorate. I would expect that in a country like ours, if we had proportional representation instead of voting by a simple cross there would be an enormous number of spoilt votes". Mr. Fenner Brockway with his usual refreshing honesty said that whilst he recognised "the case for proportional representation in a re-constituted parliamentary constitution, I believe that it would be absolutely fatal in British Guiana at this moment".

As you know, the People's Progressive Party has won the three general elections since the introduction of universal adult suffrage. In the 1957 and 1961 elections, the British Government altered the constituency boundaries with the object of defeating the P.P.P. Now they are altering the whole electoral arrangements in their efforts to get rid of the PPP from office. Naturally our people must have grave doubts about the sincerity of the British Government's oft-declared belief in Parliamentary democracy. They believe in it once it produces the results they want, but only then.

Q. How does your Party visualize the future?

A. Our Party grows stronger every day. Our members are united and determined in the struggle. We are encouraged by the increasing sympathy we have gathered from the international working class movement. We will secure victory; the struggle may be long, but history is on our side.