

The 23rd Congress Of The PPP

by Janet Jagan

The Congress was held in a cinema in Georgetown, the venue of the first Congress held in 1951. The opening session, which was public, was highlighted by the arrival of youths carrying flaming torches, who had run by relay teams, covering 270 miles from the two ends of the coastal belt. This was followed by the traditional garlanding of the fraternal delegations and P.P.P. leaders by the Pioneers.

A special paper marking the historical significance of the three national events of 1988 — the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indian indenture immigrants; the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery; and the 40th anniversary of the Enmore Martyrs, was presented.

After the closure of the Public session, Congress delegates listened to the condensed version of the 102 page report of the Central Committee, presented by General Secretary, Cheddi Jagan. Many hours were devoted to delegates responses and comments on this document embracing reports on the international situation, the economic and social conditions, the political situation and the party's organisation, finances, education, parliamentary front, and its youth and women's arms.

As a party of the working people, the report noted that one of the priorities is to prevent thermo-nuclear holocaust from breaking out. "Life itself has demonstrated how formidable this task is, though there is one compensation factor that is of singular and knowledgeable importance: **the existence of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Community of States**".

Thirteen pages of the section dealing with the International situation are devoted to a full analysis of Central America and the Caribbean, a matter of close and deep concern to the P.P.P. Eleven countries, and delegations of the 13 political parties from this region attended the Congress.

The report stated proudly that the P.P.P. is the only political force in Guyana to lend consistent and active support to, and solidarity with, the FMLN/FDR of El Salvador, observing that this is consistent with the internationalist traditions of the P.P.P. Strong support was

expressed for the Haitian people now engaged in a life and death struggle for democracy, peace and social progress.

The exigencies of the present situation obtaining in the Caribbean impels the Marxist-Leninist, revolutionary-democratic organisations and left social-democrats to act together in the struggle against imperialist domination for the de-militarisation of the region, for the recognition of the Caribbean as a **Zone of Peace**, for genuine independence, respect for human rights and the principle of ideological pluralism, for the deepening of democracy both at the representative and participatory levels, and for the defence of the region's sovereignty and independence.

The analysis of the economic situation in Guyana showed negative growth. Even the government admitted to a "sluggish" economy. The performance of the three main sectors of the economy (sugar, bauxite, and rice) showed lowered production. Sugar production dropped from 370,000 tonnes in 1971 to 224,500 tonnes in 1986. Rice production dropped from 171,700 tonnes in 1986 to 146,000 tonnes in 1987. Bauxite production showed a similar trend.

A study of the national debt showed the picture of the bankruptcy brought on by the People's National Congress (P.N.C.) regime which was installed in 1964 when the C.I.A assisted in propelling that party into office after destabilising the P.P.P. government. In 1964, debt payment was G\$10 million representing 15% of current revenue. By 1984, the PNC government by wild borrowing and irresponsible spending caused debt payments to reach G\$699 million or 116% of current revenue. By 1987 debt payments rose to G\$1 billion and for 1988 they will amount to G\$1.6 billion. This is G\$600 million more than capital revenue expected, and more than half of the current expenditure.

The central committee report observed that the PPP had for years advocated a radical approach to the debt problem. As late as the 1988 budget debate in April, it had called on the regime to cut payments to 10% and use the funds released for development purposes and to satisfy some of the immediate needs of the people. If this had been done, some G\$1 billion could be released for development this year alone.

The majority of Guyanese are experiencing a rapid deterioration of their living standards. The wide gap be-

tween take-home pay and prices of basic consumer items has widened over the past 3 years. The biggest single negative effect on wage levels and cost of living was the massive 1987 devaluation — 127% at the Central Bank rate and 483% at the commercial bank rate. Today the minimum daily wage of around G\$25 is less than US\$1 on the black-market, which is the main factor controlling prices. The present minimum wage is only half of the G\$52 demanded by the labour movement in 1986. It has been estimated that a worker's wage in 1987 could buy only half of what the 1986 wage bought.

As to education, health and other social services, the 1988 budget reduced allocations, providing only 5.5% for education, 4.5% for health and 0.1 % for housing, a total reduction of 4½% in 3 years. Social services have gone steadily downhill and the results, are being seen in the poor quality of education, in increasing malnutrition in children and the rise in infant mortality and diseases. For example, malaria increased from 3,184 confirmed cases in 1980 to 34,142 in 1987.

The report, examining the implications of an impending deal with the International Monetary Fund, observed that it would not solve the economic crisis, but would increase burdens on the working people. It seems certain that a new devaluation is imminent, and like the last one would further reduce living standards. The PPP would continue to campaign against any I.M.F. deal.

The political situation, the report said, has changed significantly during the past three years. New shifts and alliances have taken place. The first major shift took place soon after the 22nd Congress with the death of the former President L. F. S Burnham. The P.P.P/P.N.C dialogue was discontinued by the new PNC leadership, headed by President Desmond Hoyte. Instead, the P.N.C went ahead with elections in December 1985, rigged as were all the previous elections held under the P.N.C government. These elections were even worse than those of 1980 with polling agents of opposition parties being forcibly ejected from polling stations. The electoral fraud elicited a tremendous outcry in Guyana and the Caribbean.

New shifts have been made in the ruling party's recent pronouncements on privatisation and denationalisation and its "open door" policy to foreign private capital, in

accord with demands of the I.M.F, World Bank and C.B.I. Even on the contentious matter of industrial waste, the government has entered into a deal with a U.S company to use Guyana as a garbage dump. There has been strong opposition to this. "We have had enough of American garbage", declared the report.

Corruption has become a way of life under the system of bureaucratic-state, parasitic and co-operative capitalism. An Integrity Commission, established after the P.P.P and other groups had called for an independent body to examine corruption and other ills of the society, confirmed that bribery and corruption had reached "almost epidemic" proportions noting that "a number of public officers seem to think that public funds are there for taking". Hitting out against racial and political discrimination, the commission observed that: "selection and promotion on merit are sacrificed on the altar of political partisanship, party loyalty, nepotism and personal friendship."

The report to Congress criticises the inaction of the Trades Union Congress (T.U.C.) in the face of mounting abuses against the working class, whose standard of living has deteriorated, and urges that necessary action be taken to get the T.U.C to fight for the workers and to democratise its archaic rules. The leadership of the emasculated P.N.C-controlled T.U.C has assumed the role of "labour aristocrats" who are prepared to pass resolutions at annual conference rituals, but will not take any action to mobilise workers for struggle.

The 23rd Congress endorsed the Party's involvement with the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (P.C.D.), which was formed after the rigged 1985 elections and had issued a call for a broad-based representative government in Guyana based on free and fair elections. This campaign for free and fair elections, said the report, must be intensified at home and overseas. The 5-party coalition must continue to agitate for a meeting between the President and P.C.D to insist on electoral reforms before the next election, due in 1990. "Our party" stated the CC report "is working strenuously to strengthen the unity, organisation and effectiveness of the P.C.D."

The party stated its commitment to the defence of the working masses and declared that it would continue to fight for the return of their fundamental right to choose a government of their will. Only then can a gen-

uine effort be made to end the present chaos and suffering and to mould a nation with a secure economic, political and social future.

The report ended on a high note: "The future is bright and it belongs to us." Delegates were urged to control apathy and defeatism. "To those who in despair ask how long, our answer, in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr is: As long as it is necessary!"

There were other reports to the Congress including those from the Elections Commission, the Auditing and Controls Commission and an evaluation of the fulfilment of the decisions of the 22nd Congress. The congress also approved amendments to update the Party's Programme adopted in 1979.

Making his "charge" to congress at the conclusion of the three-day meeting, General Secretary, Cheddi Jagan, declared "We are working in unity to chart our course ahead. Our task is to work unitedly and untiringly for revolutionary and democratic change. We have been inspired by our friends, who have come here from afar. As long as we have friends, representative of the most progressive and revolutionary forces, we can be confident of solidarity

"We are in a struggle to be free. We are fighting a new type of slavery."

He urged members to work harder to concentrate on the battle for free and fair elections. Delegates then lifted him up and carried him through the cheering hall of delegates — the 23rd Congress ending on a note of vigour and enthusiasm.

In a traditional meeting before the Congress fraternal delegates from the Caribbean and Central America, and including Suriname and Venezuela, discussed the topic: "The Struggle for Democracy in the Caribbean and the Way Forward."

In a statement issued after the two-day conference held at Freedom House, (Headquarters of the P.P.P.) it was agreed that a viable left alternative is possible to replace the right wing forces which keep alternating in power without changing the conditions of the people.

The struggle for real democracy in the region; the creation of broad fronts is a necessary political and organisational instrument.