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PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY
Georgetown

Question-and-Answer Radio Script

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QUESTION

One party has alleged that your Party is dictatorial, and that there will be no more elections following this one in August. What is your Party's attitude to this question?

ANSWER

The allegation is false. The Party's members on the Constitutional Committee declared they were in favour of the British Parliamentary System of Government. This, as we all know, provides for periodic elections based on universal adult suffrage and fairly defined constituencies. It is strange that while charges of totalitarianism are hurled at us, it is the P.P.P. which has been subjected to a denial of democratic rights.

After winning the 1953 General Election, the Party was thrown out of the Government on the basis of vague allegations and official fabrications, and its principal leaders imprisoned and placed under restriction orders. The usual whitewashing commission justified this destruction of democracy in the name of democracy.

In 1957, constituency boundaries were gerrymandered to give an unfair electoral advantage to political opponents of the Party. And again, this year, there is the same attempt to stifle the popular will by undermining the very basis of free and fair elections.

It should be noted that charges of totalitarianism are nothing new. They have always been made by potential dictators who aspire to serve not the people, but the privileged minority interested in preserving what it considers to be an eternal economic system, not subject to further change.

Communism is now the fashionable word of abuse; but it is worthy of note that at one time in England, France and America words like owned scho[illegible]s," "Republicans," and "Democrats" were held to be equally th[illegible]e who opposed social injustice. Indeed, [illegible]y and Prosperity against Republicans

and Levellers" was formed by a retired colonial judge, John Reeve, during the time when the 13 American colonies were fighting the British for independence. Tom Paine's THE RIGHTS OF MAN was regarded as a seditious libel. THE AGE OF REASON, also from the pen of Tom Paine, although fundamentally a Christian declaration in accord with the Gospel, was branded a blasphemous libel.

In all ages, whenever men fought for freedom by directing their assaults against the oppressors, they were always maligned in the same way as the P.P.P. is today.

Charles Stuart, king of England, said the only right people had was the right to be governed. A bishop of the House of Lords proclaimed: "All the people had to do with laws was to obey them." Chartism in the 1830's and 1840's in Britain, demanding adult suffrage and voting by secret ballot, was branded absurd.

Today the ruling classes talk glibly about the people's freedom as though they had bestowed it upon them. This is false. The workers have had to struggle for this freedom. The blood of the Chartists drips upon the pagesxof English history, just as the blood of Africans besmears the pages of South Africa's history. From the time of Cromwell in England, through the 1689 Revolution, through the French and American Revolutions, and through the other great revolutionary movements of our time, people have had to struggle for their rights.

We say today: The people of this country must make the laws by which they are to be governed without the interference or influence of any outside authority, whether temporal or spiritual. This means rule by the people, which is the essence of democracy, exercised through a system of representation and delegated authority, periodically renewed by means of free and fair elections.

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QUESTION

It has been asserted that your Party is opposed to religion and that the recent proposal to take over control of 51 Government-owned schools corroborates this. Would you like to comment?

ANSWER

The P.P.P. has moved, and agreed to, the insertion of a Bill of Rights in the new Constitution. Among these rights is that of the freedom of religion. State control of schools by no means indicates a refusal to recognize religious freedom. We believe in the freedom of religion as we do in all the other fundamental freedoms, which include freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, as well as freedom from arbitrary arrest and freedom from want. Having said this, the implication is clear, that like the people of the United States, India, and elsewhere, we believe in the separation of Church and State.

The Church has in many instances sided with the forces opposed to progress and social change. There is abundant historical proof that religion has always been used by ruling classes as an instrument for maintaining themselves in power. Men of wealth at all times and in all ages have used it as a social and political convenience. Today is no exception.

We believe that religion is a private matter, and that no one should be denied the right to practise it, or not to practise it. And by "religion" we mean religion in general, not only a particular creed, whether Christian or non-Christian.

So strongly did the founders of the United States believe in a strictly secular government, unrelated to Church, creed, or general religion, that the First Amendment to the Constitution, passed shortly after its adoption, provided that:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

Churches and religious organizations are private institutions, and as such must be maintained by those who feel the need for spiritual guidance. It is unfair to the people of any country who profess various religious faiths -- Christian and non-Christian -- for the public schools to be used by private religious bodies which discriminate against people holding rival religious beliefs. This is a misuse of public funds, and no government which claims to operate impartially on behalf of all those under its jurisdiction can permit this injustice.

In no public or tax-supported school in America is there any religious control or instruction. Yet the American people are

no more irreligious than those of other Christian countries.

There is no law to prevent religious bodies from establishing their own schools, furnishing them, paying the salaries of their tecahers, propagating their own religious creeds, and even going to the extent of limiting employment and entry to those of their own religious persuasions. What we say is that public funds must not be used for such narrow, sectarian purposes, since all of the people contribute to these funds.

In the same way as the Church fought bitterly to preserve, firstly, slavery, and later, feudalism, so is it fighting today to maintain privileges which have long been condemned and abolished in progressive societies. Dr. Eric Williams pointed out in his book, CAPITALISM AND SLAVERY, that leading church figures, including the Bishop of Exeter, fought bitterly against the abolition of slavery.

In England, with its established Church, the state persecuted in the name of religion, and brought charges against, many of the leading freedom fighters. In America, Thomas Jefferson was vilified and branded "godless" because he fought for religious freedom. Galileo, Darwin, and others of eminence in scientific and cultural fields were persecuted. Blasphemy prosecutions were common throughout history, and were for all practical purposes persecutions aimed at penalizing politics by the aid of theological prejudice.

Much of the discrimination practised by religious bodies is due to the fact that most religions are now split into hundreds of warring sects, each jealous of the other and ever striving for supremacy. What pattern and example of unity are they offering mankind?

The secular state, neither professing nor supporting any religious creed, is far more able to unify its citizens and insure peace and religious freedom for all. The allegation, therefore, that the P.P.P. is out to destroy religion is utterly false, and is a political device for arousing prejudice against the Party.

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QUESTION

It is charged that the P.P.P. is an enemy of private property. Is this so?

ANSWER

The P.P.P. is not an enemy of private property. In fact, the reason for the Party coming into existence was to provide the ill-clad ill-fed, and ill-housed with the opportunity to own more material things, that is, more private property. The Party is, however, opposed to the use to which some people put private property. Throughout history, private property has been used by a few to exploit the majority. And it has been rightly said that men of property have always hated democracy.

In the days of slavery, the slaveowners not only owned lands and other means of production, but also owned the bodies of the slaves themselves. That was chattel slavery. In feudal economy, the feudal lords owned all the lands and mercilessly exploited their serfs and tenants, who were no longer chattel slaves, but were nevertheless tied to the land. This explains why in our statute books there are Rent Restriction and Rice Farmers' Security of Tenure Ordinances. Tenants of houses and tenants of lands have to be protected by these laws against unscrupulous and rapacious landlords who, if given the opportunity, would use their private property to exploit them. In present-day conditions of capitalist exploitation, we see a world-wide Socialist movement for the liberation of man from wage-slavery and for the restoration of his full freedoms.

In other words, the P.P.P. is not opposed to private property; rather, it wants each individual in the community to have his own private property for the use of himself and his family. This, of course, is only possible when those who work and produce all wealth receive in return the full value of what they have produced. At present, the vast majority of the people are exploited. Workers and farmers are forced to yield the greater part of their product to a tiny minority which owns and controls the greater part of private property -- land, mines, factories, and the like. That is the type of private property to which the P.P.P. is opposed.

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QUESTION

Will you please say what is the attitude of your Party towards private capital?

ANSWER

The P.P.P. is not opposed to private capital. It is, however, conscious of the grave danger to the economy and to the Guianese people of the concentration of ownership in a few hands. The Party will therefore plan along the lines of countries like India and Ghana, where provision is made for public, public-private, private, and cooperative sectors of the economy.

We hold the view that the commanding heights of the economy must be publicly owned. In other words, State control by and for the people is the aim of the Party. We believe that native capital should be encouraged to invest in the field of light industries. We will provide adequate incentives and protection against foreign competition whenever necessary, as we have done in the past, to Bank Breweries Limited, for example. Cooperatives, we are determined must play an increasing role in all economic sectors, including credit marketing, and production. We will be prepared to discriminate in th matter of granting incentives in favour of cooperatives.

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QUESTION

What is your Party's attitude to trade with foreign countries?

ANSWER

We will embark on a policy of free trade with all countries prepared to deal fairly and squarely with us. We are aware of the fact that there is inequality in international trade, and that the more developed countries have a decided advantage over the newly emergent territories. Consequently, we are prepared to conclude bilateral trade agreements whenever necessary and wherever possible, in order to change the traditional pattern of buying dear and selling cheap.

Our international relations will be based on the principle of friendship towards all and enmity towards none. We will pursue a policy of the Open Door. For instance, Cuba has offered us a price for rice higher than that now being paid by the West Indies. Thi

means more money for the rice producers. Oil, too, can be bought from Cuba at a lower price, thereby saving the consumer money by providing cheaper gasoline, kerosine, and other byproducts of oil.

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QUESTION

Although your Party claims to be Socialist, it is limiting the wages of Government workers. Is not this policy inconsistent with Socialist principles?

ANSWER

It is true that Socialism aims at a very high standard of living for workers, but what we have in British Guiana is a very backward colonial economy, with political control still in the hands of the Colonial Office. The result is that Socialist planning of the economy is impossible. We cannot, as a colonial country, fully enjoy the advantages of trade with countries from which we can get the best terms. There are also frustrating financial limitations imposed on the present Government.

It cannot therefore mean that because the Socialist P.P.P. is the Majority Party in the Government, the workers are immediately rewarded with large wage increases.

The working people of our country have a low standard of living because of deficiencies in the economy, because of a very low production level, both in industry and in agriculture. In looking back on the achievements of the present Government, it will be seen that this is what we have been concentrating on: the establishment of industries and the expansion and diversification of agriculture. More goods obviously mean higher living standards for all.

There have also been greater expenditures on social services, which have been in effect a further contribution to the improved living standards of the working people. For example, in Pure Water Supply, the Government's expenditure is three times greater than that of the Interim Government. A series of Health Centres built all over the country aim at providing free medical services to the people.

There is a limit, in the present circumstances, to the amount the Government can allocate for increased wages for its workers.

During the discussions on this matter, Dr. Jagan, the Minister of Trade and Industry, challenged the T.U.C. leaders to examine the 1960-64 development programme to see if more money could be given to the workers.

Merely paying more to those who already have jobs with the Government will not help to solve our economic problems. The McGale survey pointed out that in 1956 there were 30,000 unemployed and 15,000 underemployed. It warned that unless the development programme kept pace with the rapid population growth, we would have on our hands 91,000 unemployed by 1965.

Mr. Gorsuch had recommended an increase in the minimum wage from $2.52 to $2.70. The present Government increased this to $2.75, an increment of 9 percent as compared with 7 percent recommended by Mr. Gorsuch. Subsequently, there was a further wage boost to $3.04, making a total increase of 20 percent in the wages of Government workers. The Government has allocated $2 million in the budget for wage increases. A further $800,000 have been set aside for increases in civil servants' salaries. Remember, too, that payments for old age pensions and social assistance have gone up by $1 million.

In other respects we have made life more tolerable for the workers. For example, workers in the garment industry have been given minimum wages, and steps have been taken to improve working conditions in the timber, sawmill, aerated water, building trade, and printing industries, as well as in laundries and licensed premises. The amendment of the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance has also brought much benefit to workers.

From all this, it can be seen that, consistent with Socialist principles, the People's Progressive Party has shown much concern for, and contributed to the best of its ability to, the welfare of the working class, in spite of the severe political and other limitations under which it operates.

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QUESTION

Did your Party say that lands should belong to the people? Is not the leasehold policy of the Government a denial of this principle?

of a very important principle, that is, that land should be given to those who need it, and not necessarily to those whose only qualification for it is the ability to pay for the land. If the Government were to sell the holdings at Black Bush Polder, it would cost the farmers $11,500 for a plot of 17.5 acres.

Farmers can rest assured that a lease is a legal title which is valid in law and will be upheld in the Courts. The possession of this lease affords a security for the raising of loans from the Credit Corporation and other lending agencies.

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