Commemorating Death of Enmore Riot Victims

Thousands of Sugar Estates Workers Make Pilgrimage to Graves

Touching Scenes at Le Repentir Cemetery

Yesterday’s scenes, but for the fact that there was a lengthy political meeting on Bourda Green, were reminiscent of June 16, 1948, as thousands of sugar estate workers trekked to the City to commemorate the death of five of their fellow workers, shot during the East Coast labour unrest a year ago.

As far as the East Coast was concerned, some two thousand men and women tramped along the dusty road, from Enmore, 16 miles away. They carried shoulder high a Doli packed about three feet high with wreaths, the while Indian lads struck gongs and blew shells and played Indian tunes on a bugle, according to Oriental custom.

At Bourda Green the large gathering was addressed by several well-known labour leaders and a number of resolutions were passed.

One of these called upon Government to establish central cane factories in the three countries and to recommend to the Home Government the nationalisation of the local sugar industry.

Sugar estate workers started arriving in Georgetown from early morning. Using every available means of transportation, they came from the East and West Bank and West Coast; but the largest numbers travelled on foot from the East Coast.

SLOGANS

As they entered the city they carried banners bearing such slogans as: ‘We don’t want any more shooting in British Guiana. This is the end.’

‘We asked for bread, they gave us bullets!’

Mother India is free. Her children chained in sugar estates. High time for shooting of human beings like birds to end. Yes, time. ‘Our leaders cannot even visit us. Away with cut and load and load is slow murder.’ Reorganise the Labour Department. We don’t want Joint Committees. Feed us with the bill of human rights. The Union, we want, must represent us. No time for joint and comparative!’ The Labour Department is not protecting labour. Abolish it in loving memory of our beloved brothers who were shot at Enmore. ‘What has been done for the five widows?’ ‘What has been done for the ten fathers?’ ‘Nationalise the sugar industry.’

SHOOTING INCIDENTS RECALLED

Addressing the gathering at Bourda Green, Dr. J. P. Lachman Singh, Vice-President of the G. E. I. A., said they had come to the City to commemorate the death of the five workers who were shot at Enmore to record their protest against the shooting. He told the workers that there was, at least, one instance of a shooting that occurred in the Colony within the past 76 years. These shootings, he said, were as follows:


‘Dr. Lachman Singh said the people of Enmore had made up their minds that never again must there be a recurrence of such a deplorable state of affairs in British Guiana, and they intended making an annual pilgrimage to the graves of their fellow workers, thereby living in memory that memorable day.

Mr. Ramlogan in a short address stressed the need for the workers to have a voice in the conduct of affairs of the colony as this emphasised, was the only means of ensuring for them fair play. He said that they were making a contribution towards the Colony’s economy and, therefore, had every right to enjoy such a privilege.

As a final word, Mr. V. J. R. Ramphall, Inspector of Labour, congratulated the people on the orderly way in which they were behaving. He assured them that there was not a single Government official who wanted ever to see repeated what occurred on the East Coast on June 16 last year.

DR. JAGAN’S SPEECH

The Hon. Dr. Cheddi B. Jagan referred to the fact that although he was an officer of one of the trade unions recognised by the proprietors of sugar estates, he could not enter those estates, because the proprietors had on him a trespass notice and the Court had granted a temporary injunction restraining him from entering the properties. He said it was clear to him that the proprietors had decided...
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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this meeting request and empower the Guiana Industrial Workers’ Union to make representation, and to sign and transmit all documents concerning this important matter as early as possible.

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Another resolution protested against the actions taken by Government in industrial disputes in the past and sought the introduction of legislation to enable representatives of employees to meet them wherever they may be, in order that the representatives may be able to act on their behalf.

Yet another resolution requested Government to view sympathetically the cases of the dependents of those men who were killed and injured during the shooting at Enmore last year.

The resolution asked the Officer Administering the Government to receive a small delegation shortly after the arrival in the Colony of Pandit Satya Chandra Shastri, Indian Commissioner in the British Caribbean, to discuss the matter.

At about 3:00 p.m., the meeting ended and the workers wended their way to Le Repentie Cemetery where touching scenes were witnessed. Women, including the wives of the five men over whose graves the breasts were recently built with marble slabs bearing inscriptions, wept as two Pandits performed Hindu rites. The graves were afterwards covered with wreaths.

Enmore Riot Victims

that certain people must not represent the estate workers and he was sure they would exert every effort to prevent him sitting with them around a table to bargain on behalf of the workers. However, he added that whatever the proprietors had done or might do, he was not going to allow them to defeat him. Until the Venn report was released, he was sure the proprietors would all they could to subjugate and disorganise the workers.

Speaking for fully half an hour, Dr. Jagan referred to the Boland report stating that he had acquired from time ago what action Government intended taking against the people responsible for the shooting at Enmore, but ‘nothing had come of his inquiry.’

He also spoke on the question of the withdrawal of the sworn witnesses from sugar estates and said he had told the Finance Committee that Government had given an undertaking to continue the supervision of weighing until the Venn report was submitted.

After making a few more observations, Dr. Jagan said the only way the people would get anything was to march and demonstrate. You must make a noise. You must demonstrate. That is the only way Government will listen to you.

Mrs. Jagan also spoke.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED

Among the resolutions passed were the following:

RESOLVED, in view of the inhumane treatment to the poor working class people, particularly those who are working on the sugar estates, which is definitely keeping back the progress of the Colony as a whole, Government see the advisability to establish central cane factories in the three Counties and/or recommend to the British Government in Parliament the nationalisation of the sugar industry of British Guiana.

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