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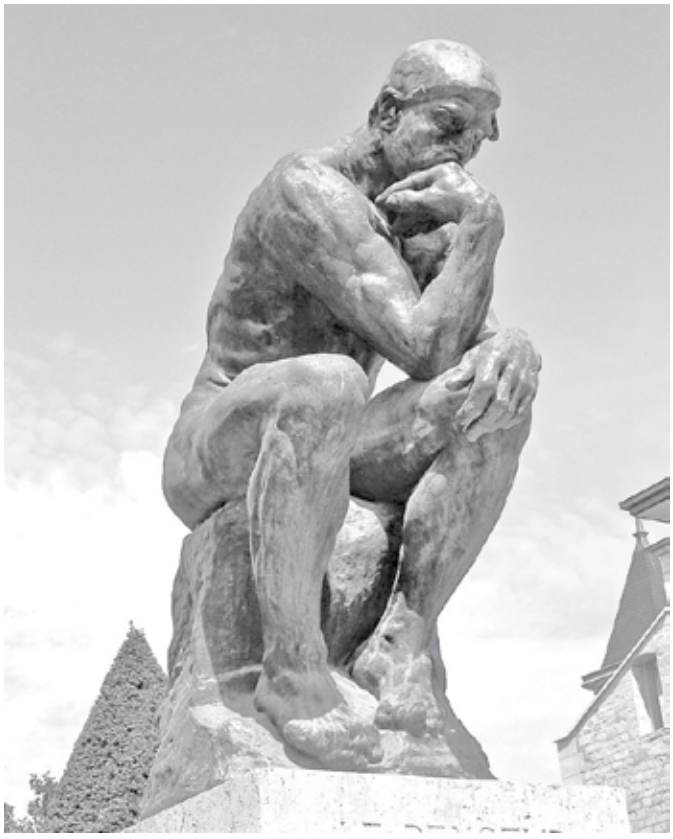

The Thinker (French: Le Penseur) is a bronze sculpture by Auguste Rodin.

Editorial

On the eve of the just concluded NATO summit in Türkiye Mark Rutte, Secretary General of NATO is reported to have said "We are preparing for a war with Russia"

Around the same time, Finland which borders Russia agreed to allow the import and transit of nuclear weapons on its territory. At this point in time, there is absolutely no doubt that NATO countries are providing military and intelligence assistance to Ukraine to fight Russia.

What is the significance of these statements and developments? Clearly, they signify beyond the shadow of doubt, that the outbreak of a war between Russia and NATO countries, whether for offensive or defensive purposes, is looming on the horizon.

The line between having 'the right to defend one's country' and having 'the right to protect one's sovereignty' has been blurred in the war between Russia and Ukraine; As support for Ukraine from the West intensifies, the distinction between the EU and NATO is hard to find.

In the fog of it's war with Ukraine and in the midst of harsh and undiplomatic exchanges with NATO governments, Russia has declared that it will not sit on its hands and do nothing while warmongering European governments openly declare that they are preparing for war with Russia. To achieve this goal, every effort is being made by belligerent forces in Europe to drag the US into a war with Russia just as Israel is working overtime to drag the US into a war with Iran.

With the hope of de-escalating increased tensions between Russia and Europe, Russia declared is not looking for a war with Europe nor does it have intentions to invade or to occupy territories in Europe. Nevertheless, it is prepared to defend itself should a war with Europe become unavoidable.

In the wake of increasing tensions in the European theatre what is abundantly clear is that the human, material and environmental destruction that will result from the outbreak of a war with drones, hypersonic missiles and weapons of mass destruction on land, air and sea will be unimaginable and unprecedented in human history.

With Russia declaring that it has elevated its Special Military Operation in Ukraine to a full scale war, the prospect of NATO joining openly that war and with it eventual becoming a nuclear war is like a gigantic clock ticking inexorably towards the hour when such a war appears menacingly on the global horizon.

Based on empirical evidence, the peoples of the world do not want wars of any kind.
They prefer jobs, better wages, enhanced social security and an improved standard of living. Reports indicate that there are certain leaders in Europe and North America who, think otherwise. They believe and say that the world will be a better place with a weaker and ultimately, with the total destruction of Russia.

There is a lingering predisposition in some European capitals that a war with Russia by 2030 is unavoidable if not inevitable. This belief is grounded in the outdated, unscientific and mechanistic thinking about waging war in these modern times. Should this view manage to succeed, it is clear that a war between Russia and Europe may result in a nuclear catastrophe affecting not only European cities, towns and villages but way beyond Europe's borders.

It is this kind of thinking that leaves those of us who live in this part of the world wondering how come talk of war has become so commonplace in the narrative of some world leaders that it is now an acceptable inevitability in the practice of international relations.

Western mega-media have managed to tip the balance for reporting the Russia/Ukraine war in favour of Ukraine and NATO. They bury objectivity, and, by highlighting the possibility of war between Russia and Europe ignore reality that the nature of war has changed so drastically that nuclear war is now more possible than ever before.

A war of such proportions and pregnant with untold ramifications will be the mother of all wars and will either bring an end to all wars or open the possibility of a Third World War

We Guyanese apart from being concerned about the territorial controversy with Venezuela, ask; what is the purpose of a Russia/NATO war and whose interests will it serve?

We Guyanese are not interested in hearing neither platitudes nor hyperbole about 'shared values' nor 'freedom from autocrats' or about 'shared interests.' For us it is tangible economic benefits that matters most of all.

We Guyanese are fundamentally interested in talk about life and living, not about killing people like canon fodder, but it seems very hard for the war-mongers to start talking about peace and human development that will serve the peoples of the world.

Guyanese should ask what and who are the forces driving the madness towards a world war and what is the future they have in mind.

We Guyanese would like to know what is the motivation for preparing for war with Russia.
We are not interested in knowing the ideological nor political reasoning by which it can happen; nor are we interested in hearing that a war with Russia will be launched in our interest, national or otherwise.

It is one thing to talk about lofty intentions to wage war but another to implement a plan to wage war for which we Guyanese never offered to help design, nor to play any part of it's implementation. Where's the glory here and for whom?
After all, our lives matter too!

While the conflict in Europe continues, the genocide and destruction in the Arab countries in the Middle East intensify, by the hour. Even though negotiations have produced agreements for cease fire, these have been breached by the USA and Israel, before the ink has dried. Children deliberately targeted as confirmed by the UN (babies included) mothers and every other category of humankind continue to be slaughtered by the Israelis, with the tacit support by many countries in the Western bloc. Hospitals and every other type of infrastructure are being flattened. Food is being denied to starving children, women (including those pregnant) and the aged. What manner of human beings have we descended into?

It is a shame that some ARAB COUNTRIES ARE NOT ONLY SAYING NOTHING IN DEFENCE OF THEIR SISTERS AND BROTHERS BEING SYSTEMATICALLY DECIMATED BUT OFFER THEIR COUNTRIES AS LAUNCHING BASES FOR THE CRIMES OF WAR, MURDER AND DESTRUCTION BEING PERPETRATED.

THEN there is Cuba!!! The THINKER has carried articles on the situation in Cuba before, but it is worth mentioning again. The unjust and illegal blockade by the country that boasts of being the most powerful in the world, against a poor people, previously severely exploited by these same rich and powerful Corporation and men (who used Cuba as their playground) continues to strangle Cuba for more than three and a half decades.

To add insult to injury, having seen Cuba, not succumbing to the blackmail, threats, coercion and every imaginable wrong against a principled people, the USA have now intensified their attempts to strangle the courageous people of the Socialist Republic.
Again, the sad part is that independent countries which Cuba helped in so many ways, have now turned their backs on Cuba, in their time of need, for the mythical "thirty pieces of silver".
When will it ever end?

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60 Eventful Years of Independence

Guyana was granted its Independence by the British Government after centuries of struggles, first by slaves and later by indentured labourers and finally by a National Liberation Movement. The new state was born on May 26, 1966.

The earnest battle for freedom actually began in the early 1940s when Dr. Cheddi Jagan returned to the colony in 1943. This was at a time when the second World War at its height and the British had left British Guiana practically on its own. According to Dr. Jagan, it was a time when the colony was at buzz with ideas.

It coincided with a growing awareness by the working class in urban areas and farmers and peasants in the rural countryside. Trade unions were being formed as the workers organised to defend their economic circumstances. The struggles of the workers in the Caribbean region were so intense that the colonial authorities set up a Royal Commission (popularly known as the Mohen Commission, called after the name of its chairman).

The commission's report spoke about the terrible working and living conditions of the masses in the region that gave rise to the uprising in the whole British Caribbean.

Details of these tumultuous events could be found in the book "Labour In The West Indies" by the world-renowned economist Sir Aurthur Lewis.

Cheddi Jagan and his wife joined the trade union struggles. In the process they met two other prominent trade unionists, Josylin Hubbard and Ashton Chase. Together they formed an

organisation called the Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

As the name indicated this was a political body. The four founders of the PAC recognised that to look at the long-term interest of the working people they had to engage the masses in political struggles.

One of the main tasks of the PAC was to educate working people as to their interests, to make them aware of the struggles of other peoples both in the colonial world and in the developed world.

They had set the task of bringing people to the stage of founding a working-class political party which would champion both the immediate and long-term interests of the working people.

The most prominent task at that time was to win Independence for the colony. This was seen as an indispensable task towards the socio-economic freedom for the working and oppressed masses.

The PAC became very popular in a very short period of time. It communicated to the masses by holding meetings in villages and street corners and by producing a weekly newssheet called "PAC Bulletin." Its message was that the working people have to join not only in Trade Union struggles but in political battles, first being for independence.

The movement was given a great impetus in 1947 when elections were held for the Legislative Assembly. Dr. Jagan won a seat and became the first Working Class representative in the Legislative Council (Parliament).

He used the forum masterfully. Ashton Chase, in his book "History of Trade Unionism" described Dr. Jagan's work in the following way "In Dr. Jagan the workers found an outstanding champion of their rights. The solemnity of the Legislative Council was rudely shaken by his vigorous advocacy of the cause of the workers. He had a passion for statistics. He used these in his pungent and forceful arguments to expose reaction and to lay bare before the workers, the vicious system that exploited them. At sitting after sitting, he assaulted the vaunted privileges of the capitalists. On many occasions, single handedly, but nevertheless most heroically and inspiringly he fought for the workers rights..."

The following year, 1948, three major strikes took place that shook the colonial authorities. The first was the strike of the transport workers who were fighting to protect their Trade Union when the manager, Colonel Tear, a former British Army officer, tried to break the Transport Workers Union by sending some of its most important leaders far away in the interior. The strike was so effective that in a few days the Governor removed Col. Tear from his post.

The second strike was in the bauxite industry. This strike was long in the making. Workers were being retrenched in large numbers and their appeals to negotiate conditions of work were rejected. The management was hostile and unresponsive to the demands of the workers, which led to the strike, and eventually ended with significant gains.

The third strike was in the sugar industry. It began with the fight to prevent the change of working conditions and evolved into a battle for industrial democracy. Workers were demanding the right to choose a union of their choice to represent them. It was a bitter struggle.

The management of the Sugar industry, backed by the colonial state apparatus sought to use the strike to destroy the union which the workers had confidence in, the Guiana Industrial Workers Union." They had hoped to starve the workers back to work, but for four months the workers held out. Eventually, the authorities resorted to force and on June 16, 1948, opened gun fire on workers picketing in front the Enmore sugar factory. Five workers were killed, all shot in the back. Many others were seriously injured from gunshot wounds in their backs as well.

That incident created an outrage among the people. The call then for Independence rose quickly. Freedom from colonial domination then became a demand by workers and all patriotic people in the colony.

Those struggles accelerated the founding of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by the indomitable Cheddi Jagan, on January 1, 1950. The most important task it set it-self was Independence.

Of course, the British was resisting granting independence to any colony. Recall the statement attributed to Sir Winston Churchill in the 1940s when India's fight for freedom was at its height, he was reported to have said that he was not appointed as His Majesty's Chief Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. Therefore, every step forward was a real effort on the part of the colonial peoples.

One of the most tried and effective method the British used was divide and rule. It is known to have used tribal, racial and religion differences to fight against persons and parties fighting for freedom.

In our case, the British recruited Burnham as the leader to oppose independence. This he did on many occasions in the late 1950s and 1960s both inside the colony and at the Independence conferences in London.

To get support for that treacherous end, he and the British used race to divide and weaken the movement. They succeeded as could be seen by the riots in the 1960s.

The unity and solidarity of the labour movement was divided, and a section of the working people was misled to fight against their own interests. Racism was used to obscure the national and class interests of the masses.

By 1960, the United States, which up to then had an anti-colonial position, joined with the British to stop independence to our country. At that time their main interest was geo-political due to the struggle it was waging against the Soviet Union that

was a big advocate for real independence of the colonial peoples, among other causes.

The United States used its already powerful security apparatus to help organise and finance the local anti-independence forces in the country.

They organised riots in the city of Georgetown in 1962 against a budget that was designed to prepare our country for Independence. In 1963, they financed an eighty-days strike against a bill placed in the Legislative Council that sought to give workers the right to elect a union of their choice to represent them. This was to expand industrial democracy.

That led to violence on the coast of Guyana, all financed by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Worse was to come the following year as every effort was ruthlessly pursued to defeat the PPP at national elections in December of 1964.

To try to defeat the PPP the electoral system was changed by the British government from the Constituency system to Proportional Representation. Being still uncertain if that measure would have been enough, they provoked and financed a strike in the sugar industry and then spread violence in the country.

About half of the leadership and many of the party's leading activities were arrested, some thirty-three comrades. These included the chairman of the Party and Deputy Premier of the colony Mr. Brindley Benn, Chairman of the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), youth arm of the PPP, Moses Bhagwan and General Secretary of the sugar workers union, Philomena Sahoye.

Violence paid for by the CIA and carried out by the People's National Congress (PNC) continued for the entire year.

The whole idea was to create the most unfavourable conditions for the PPP to fight the elections of December 1964. Incidentally the elections date was brought forward by a year. All of that was done to deprive the PPP from having time to confront the propaganda of the British and their local agents.

The PPP fought gallantly against overwhelming odds. At the elections of December 7, 1964, it won a plurality, however the British Governor did not call on the PPP to form the government, as was the practice. Instead, he called on the British/ US sponsored party, the PNC to do so.

Two years later, on May 26, 1966, Independence was granted. British Guiana became Guyana.

Our county was born with a state of Emergency in place and with PPP leaders and activists in prison.

In 1965 former Minister of Education, Cedric Vernon Nunes was also arrested and was held for years without trials. He developed asthma and kidney problems in prison.

Those PPP leaders and activists still in prison were: Vernon Nunes, Rufus Low-a-chee, Bhola Persaud, Maurice Herbert, Eric Gilbert, Prakash Persaud, Pandit Ramlall, Dia Singh, Joseph Jardim, Charles Cassato, Heeralall, Rambarran Singh and Shrikrishna Persaud.

The hopes of the progressive and democratic forces in Guyana were not realised. Sovereignty was compromised and Guyana became a Neo-Colonial state.

Many of the economic projects such as a hydro-power project; Glass Factory; Oil Exploration and Refinery among many others, were abandoned.

Secrecy and closed-door deals became the order of the day. The most notorious was the secret deal with Reynolds Metal Co. of the US to mine bauxite in the Berbice River, for years tax free and royalty free.

Corruption became the order of the day. In that very early period, we had a big scandal in agriculture with a project known as the Global Agri project.

The corruption reached the very top as was seen openly in 1968 when the Minister of Finance told the National Assembly that the Minister of Works could not account for five million dollars. The Prime Minister, Mr. Burnham, got up from his seat and said he authorised the spending without any other explanation.

Mr. Burnham was using corruption to attract members of Parliament from other parties to his, the PNC.

That act gave Mr. Burnham's PNC a majority in the Parliament which he used for constitutional purposes and to rig the first general elections after independence in 1968.

That led to more brazen corruption, unaccountability as institutions, including the judiciary, were subverted.

From then, all the national, local government, Amerindian Captains and Trade Unions elections were massively rigged. This went on until 1985.

At the economic level the PNC regime moved from having a typical neo-colonial economy to a move to nationalise some of the biggest companies in Guyana.

That policy was influenced greatly by a rapidly changing international situation. In the first place was the influence of the Non-Aligned Movement which was taking very strong anti-imperialist positions. One of the calls was to change the structure of national economies. "Countries should own and control their national resources," became a rallying call. Many third world countries began nationalising and/or calling for "measuring participation" such as 51% control of the huge companies.

The other factor that influenced the changes was the gains of the national liberation movement. It was becoming clear that the US was failing in its attempt to defeat the Vietnamese people; In Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands were freeing themselves from Portuguese Colonialism.

Many felt that imperialism was collapsing.

The PNC opportunism decided to change with the times and altered their economic policy towards a state capitalist system. First bauxite was nationalised. This gave the regime enormous power and that encouraged them to nationalise even more. Eventually it ended up owning 80% of the economy.

The nationalised industries failed mainly because of the failure to democratise the management. They were used to dispense political favours and over employment led to great inefficiency.

Politically the regime became repressive. Many other forces began to appear on the scene in opposition to the regime.

Very early we began to see that as the regime became more unpopular. Now the target was not just the PPP but all the forces that opposed the regime. Repression became an important means by which the regime held on to power.

Very early we saw the attempted assassination of Professor Jousha Ramsammy who was shot as he parked his car in front of a bank. Later that expanded and many others, some of whom were killed. The most famous being the world-renowned history professor and political activist Dr. Walter Rodney.

Father Darke, a catholic priest, editor of the Catholic Standard was knifed to death by members of the House of Israel, the thugs/enforcers of the PNC government.

Press freedom was stifled as the PPP's newspaper the "Mirror" and the Catholic Church's "Catholic Standard" were starved of newsprint. Journalist were harassed and many had to flee the country.

However, the opposition continued to grow and began to act together, even though sometimes in a limited way.

That opposition forced the PNC to open up politically. In 1986 it allowed the independent newspaper "Stabroek News" to be printed and political actions of the opposition won greater space, in the country's body politics.

At the economic level the PNC abandoned its policy and returned to its earlier position of 1964 to 1970 period. Once more we were back towards a neo-colonial status, with what today we call a neo-liberal model.

That trend was halted in 1992 when the PPP/Civic won the first free and fair elections in Independent Guyana.

In very difficult conditions the PPP/Civic tried to create a National Democratic state. It succeeded in saving the sugar industry from privatisation. The economy became a mixed economy with space created for local and foreign private sectors as well as the state.

At the political level the rights that were eroded under the PNC were restored.

This period was interrupted in 2015 when the PNC once more came to power. In the five years that they were in power, they returned to their old ways, massive corruption, unaccountability and political and racial discrimination.

In this period the country found oil and gold mining grew greatly.

However, most of the revenue from these industries are exported, by lop sided agreements all most favourable to the foreign corporation.

We have returned to a period where the government has no control of the nation's resources. The commanding heights of the economy are in the hands of big foreign companies, and we remain the producers of raw materials which we export.

The struggle to control our national resources and to move from a mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water towards a modern economy where science and technology are used in constructing a strong manufacturing and agricultural sector.

Sixty years after independence the struggles continues.

Mr. Donald Ramotar is the former President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. He also served as General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party. Mr. Ramotar is a graduate from the University of Guyana in the field of Economics. He is an avid writer, and contributes regularly to the Mirror newspaper and other publications.

Prize Still To Be Won

Speech by Dr. Cheddi Jagan seconding vote of thanks to His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent.

The severing of the British colonial tie in Guyana and the attainment of political independence are welcome features of the struggle of this country and its people for a better life. These features in today's context, do not however guarantee the realization of the better life we all seek; they merely represent a further stage — an advance - in the continuing struggle.

I wish to thank their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Kent as representatives of Her Majesty for their presence in this House to hand over the new constitutional instruments.

But lest our position at this historic ceremony be misunderstood, it is necessary for me to observe that the people whom my party represents hold considerable reservations.

The form of the constitution being handed down at this time is one which perpetuates divisions in our society and entrenches minority rule. The Constitution has failed to lay the foundation for national unity. The fundamental rights which the constitution seeks to safeguard are in great measures non-existent, and the government, has provided evidence in great abundance of its intention to render all safeguards nugatory.

Detention without trial has plagued the country since June, 1964, when by a constitutional amendment the United Kingdom Government save to the Governor, acting without advice, powers of detention without trial. This power was made to appear, by the world press and radio, to have been exercised by the government of Which I was the head. The powers were in fact arbitrarily exercised by the Governor to the detriment of the members and supporters of the People's Progressive Party. The abuse of these
powers now transferred to the government and the extension of the state of emergency beyond the date for the attainment of independence have generated fear in our land and have frustrated the efforts of many of our people in their struggle for peace and security.

As Leader of the Opposition, I have accepted invitations to consult with the Honourable Prime Minister on the making of appointments to those important public offices which form the pillars of constitutional government; but on no occasion has there been any measure of agreement. The result is that the people whom my Party represents are denied any significant participation in the governmental process. Consultations has amounted, in practice, to no more than an intimation on every occasion of the names of persons whom the inflexible government wished to prefer to high offices in this land.

Besides, political independence has been attained under the continuation and consolidation of foreign economic control and the maintenance of the colonial type of economy based on primary production and extraction. This has already resulted in the relative deterioration of the living standards of the working people.

Debt burdens are also increasing with resulting pressure upon the economy. And annually recurring budgetary deficits will mean inevitable dependence upon other governments for budgetary support.

In these circumstances there is no prospect of real independence in external affairs; and the protestations of the government of pursuing a neutral policy are illusory.

The People's Progressive Party has been the victim of repeated constitutional manipulations designed to keep it out of public office.

We are nonetheless confident that despite these manipulations the PPP can be triumphant at future elections if they are fairly held. Parliamentary democracy has an important place in this country and a heavy onus lies on us all, but more particularly on the government, to see that it works.

The PPP, the vanguard of Guyana's struggle for national liberation is convinced that liberty is achieved only after it has been struggled for and won. It cannot be the gift of charity. For the people of Guyana, real freedom is a prize still to be won. And win it we will — as a reunited people.

In Defence of Marxism

The rebellious and immortal Thomas Paine
Rob Sewell|06 July 2026

This year, on 4 July, marks the 250th anniversary of the declaration of American independence from Britain – a truly historic event.
[Originally published at communist.red]

At Trump's behest, one of the key participants attending the recent independence celebrations in Washington was our very own half-witted British monarch, King Charles III.

Charles is a direct descendant of the mad king George III, who lost America – and his mind. He was accompanied on his recent US trip by Queen Camilla, another parasite, at taxpayers' expense, of course.

This farcical pantomime took place as the Epstein scandal reached a crescendo – a scandal which has sparked the greatest crisis for the British monarchy since Charles I literally lost his head in 1649.

There is one man in particular who would have seen the obscenity in this palaver: namely, the great Thomas Paine, a true revolutionary democrat and republican.

This year also marks the 250th anniversary of the publication of Paine's famous booklet, Common Sense, a work that actually altered the course of history.

Paine's radicalism and defence of the American and French revolutions led William Pitt's government to seek his arrest for sedition. He was then found guilty of high treason, in his absence, as he wisely fled to France to avoid the hangman's noose.

Trying times

Born in the village of Thetford in Norfolk in February 1737, Thomas Paine eventually moved to London, where he mixed in radical circles.
In 1774, he emigrated to the British American colonies, following the advice of Benjamin Franklin, in time for the American Revolution.
In Philadelphia, he took up the cause of anti-slavery and became a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

World School Banner

As an avid advocate for the coming American Revolution, he wrote Common Sense, a pamphlet arguing the cause of American independence.

This became an immediate best seller, on a scale previously unknown. During the revolution, such was its impact that it sold half a million copies, and was read aloud in family circles and in taverns.

But Thomas Paine was not simply a pamphleteer. He put ideas into action by taking up arms during the American Revolution and enlisting in the army under General Nathanael Greene. Given his ability and standing, he soon became the General's aide.

"These are times that try men's souls," stated Paine. "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered."

In an echo of the future lines engraved on the Statue of Liberty, he wrote:

"O ye that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe...

"O! Receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind."

Greatly admired by Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father and future president, Paine was chosen as one of the delegation that went to Paris to seek aid for the American Revolution.

Despite his role as the 'unofficial founding father', there is no official monument to Thomas Paine in Washington D.C. But Paine was not interested in such 'honours'. His revolutionary ideas were worth much more than any stone plaque. He would certainly have complete contempt for today's leaders – minnows and political pygmies in comparison to Paine.

Old order

In April 1787, following the American Revolution, Paine left America for Europe. Eventually he arrived in Paris, where – given his radical reputation – he was not short of friends or contacts.

By this time, Europe itself was pregnant with revolution. In 1789, the hated Bastille fell and the French Revolution began to unfold.

Referring to these dramatic events, the poet Wordsworth wrote:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,

But to be young was very heaven!"

The masses were on the move, overthrowing the old order. And Paine was in the midst of it all.

Throughout Europe, the masses hailed the French Revolution, while the ruling classes everywhere trembled in their boots. This was particularly the case in Britain, ruled by an autocracy that was keen to preserve its power.

The hatred of the ruling classes towards revolutionary France was articulated by Edmund Burke in his Reflections on the Revolution in France, written in 1790.

Burke's book was an all-out assault on the French Revolution, as well as the whole conception of 'democracy' and democratic rights, on behalf of the ancien régime.

For Burke, political power had to be in the hands of the educated ruling class, Britain's 'natural' rulers – and certainly not in the hands of the "swinish multitude", who were clearly unfit to govern, let alone vote. If power fell into their hands, it would mean the end of private property and society as they knew it.

"The tyranny of the multitude is but a multiplied tyranny," was the famous phrase used by Burke to show his contempt for any form of democracy.

"Numbers in a state are always of consideration, but they are not the whole consideration," stated Burke. For him, the higher 'consideration' was the preservation of the power of the ruling class. This he saw as embodied in the (uncodified) British Constitution, which was a "liberty connected with order", and the outcome of "good and steady government".

It is no accident that Edmund Burke is regarded as one of the progenitors of our modern Conservative Party, which fought tooth and nail against any democratic progress.

Rights of Man

In response to Burke, Thomas Paine took up the cudgels in defence of the French Revolution, which stirred the hearts and minds of democrats everywhere.

He energetically defended the rights of the 'multitude'. In doing so, he became increasingly popular with the downtrodden masses. And the more his message struck a chord, the more forceful he became.

Paine's reply to Burke was issued as a book, The Rights of Man. This was a strident defence not only of the French Revolution, but a clear call to the masses in Britain to follow the French example – to do away with its own crown and aristocracy.

This became a textbook for radical democrats; a phenomenal success, which was read everywhere. The second part of Rights of Man sold around 200,000 copies, and – given its popularity – was even translated into Welsh and Gaelic.

Tom Paine and his deeds became a household name.

At this time, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing. Landless peasants were being driven into overcrowded towns – into 'satanic mills' and factories – where they were viciously exploited.

As a result, Paine began to link up his political demands with radical economic demands. This increased his popularity even more.

Radicalism vs reaction

Christopher Wyvill, a Yorkshire gentleman, reacted with alarm at Paine's new-found radicalism.

"It is unfortunate for the public cause," Wyvill wrote in May 1792, "that Mr Paine took such unconstitutional ground, and has formed a party for the Republic among the lower classes of the people, by holding out to them the prospect of plundering the rich."

He continued:

"If Mr Paine should be able to rouse up the lower classes, their interference will probably be marked by wild work, and all we now possess, whether in private property or public liberty, will be at the mercy of a lawless and furious rabble."

This was the true voice of the British ruling class.

Edmund Burke, a true conservative statesman, vehemently defended the system of rotten boroughs that constituted the House of Commons, whereby large cities were denied any representation. He opposed all attempts at reform.

Burke had the same utter contempt towards the poor, which is

still echoed by today's reactionaries:

"In the name of God, what is the meaning of this project of Mr Pitt concerning the further relief of the Poor? What relief do they want, except that which it will be difficult indeed to give, to make them more frugal or more industrious?"

"When a man cannot live and maintain his family by the natural hire of his labour, ought it not to be raised by authority?" asked Burke rhetorically.

"No. To provide for us in our necessities is not the power of government... The labouring poor are only poor because they are numerous... Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion should be recommended to them... The laws of commerce are the laws of nature and consequently the laws of God."

"No wonder," remarked Marx, "that, true to the laws of God and of Nature, Burke always sold himself in the best market."

Privileged parasites

For Paine, it was not the poor who were the godless parasites, but the upper echelons, beginning with the aristocracy. According to him, kings and queens were completely useless and unproductive, and would be the first to be shown the door.

In complete contrast to Burke, Paine's message was thoroughly egalitarian, and bent on destroying the "quixotic age of chivalric nonsense".

"Of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God," he declared, "than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived."

Why should we be beholden to such pampered upstarts, to their heirs and posterity, until the end of time, Paine argued.

"The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations which are to follow."

Paine attacked the very idea of hereditary royalty "as absurd as an hereditary mathematician, or hereditary wise man; and as ridiculous as an hereditary poet-laureate".

He continued: "France has not levelled; it has exalted, it has put down the dwarf, to set up the man. The punyism of a senseless word like Duke, or Count, or Earl, has ceased to please."

The privileges and power of the nobility are held by people of no-ability, to use Paine's play on words.

This is a fitting description for the royal highnesses, the dukes and duchesses, the princes and princesses, and all other such privileged bloodsuckers today. Likewise, with the so-called peers and knights of the realm – all of whom are incompatible with genuine democracy and accountability.

Constitutions, classes, and corruption

Of course, at this time, the working class was just emerging and was in its infancy. Paine's view of social classes was coloured by this situation – defining the class struggle simply in terms of "those who pay taxes, and those who receive and live upon taxes."

As for the Constitution, it was good for the likes of "courtiers, placemen, pensioners, borough-holders, and the leaders of Parties... but it is a bad Constitution for at least ninety-nine parts of the nation out of a hundred."

Paine's instincts were in the right direction, and were certainly revolutionary for his time. In fact, his comments about money and corruption are as relevant today as they were then. As he explained:

"When extraordinary power and extraordinary pay are allotted to any individual in a government, he becomes the centre, round which every kind of corruption generates and forms. Give to any man a million a year, and add thereto the power of creating and disposing of places, at the expense of a country, and the liberties of that country are no longer secure. What is called the splendour of a throne is no other than the corruption of the state. It is made up of a band of parasites, living in luxurious indolence, out of the public taxes."

Paine championed many radical and egalitarian ideas, including the abolition of the monarchy, aristocracy, as well as for the nationalisation of the land.

In the second part of his Rights of Man, he advocated redistribution of wealth to the poor – a truly revolutionary idea for its day.

For this extreme radicalism, Paine was met with the bile and deep-felt hatred of the reactionaries, who regarded him and his supporters as no better than foreign agents, intent on treason.

Compared to previous radicals, Thomas Paine was clearly pointing towards a revolutionary theory of the state and of class power, although this was inevitably quite confused, given the state of affairs.

Nevertheless, it was for him increasingly a conflict between the propertied classes and the propertyless.

This demand for democratic rights – and the end of privileges and monarchy – was also echoed by workers in struggle, and is contained in the call of the Luddites and the mythical General Ludd:

"You are requested to come forward with arms and help the Redressers to redress their rings and shake off the hateful Yoke of a Silly Old Man, George III, and his Son more silly and their Roguish Ministers, all Nobles and Tyrants must be brought down. Come let us follow the Noble Example of the brave Citizens of Paris who in sight of 30,000 Tyrant Redcoats brought a Tyrant to the Ground..."

Abolish the monarchy!

As can be seen from Paine's intervention in the American and French revolutions, he was no petty nationalist, but a man of the world in the best sense. He was a true revolutionary at heart.

"The revolutions of America and France have thrown a beam of light over the world," Paine stated – in the same way that the Russian Revolution inspired the workers of the world over 100 years later.

In fact, in September 1792, for his writings, he was elected to the French National Convention, and was made an honorary citizen of France.

His internationalism was summed up by his words: "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

Paine's clarion call against privilege and power stands in great contrast to the spineless timidity of the chiefs of today's labour movement, with their subservient deference towards the monarchy and all its miserable trappings.

He would have hated the snivelling servitude from the Labour 'leaders', who fall over themselves to accept a knighthood or a place in the House of Lords, for their services to capitalism. They are Lilliputians by comparison to Paine.

Following Sir Keir Starmer, Andy Burnham now bows down before the Crown, pledging undying allegiance to King Charles and the monarchy. After all, the British government is not the government of the people, but 'His Majesty's Government'. They are all lickspittles towards this feudal institution.

The monarchy is only maintained by the ruling class, together with its 'emergency powers', as a bulwark against the future socialist revolution. The Crown possesses extensive reserve Constitutional powers that can be used in times of crisis to defend the capitalist status quo.

Britain's monarchy is said to be 'above' party politics, which is utter nonsense. Its constitutional powers can – and will – be used to dismiss left-wing governments, as with the Gough Whitlam government in Australia in 1975.

That is the real role of these feudal relics. And that is why we stand for the complete abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords.

The scandal over (former prince) Andrew and his friendship with billionaire paedophile Jeffrey Epstein has again brought the monarchy into disrepute.

These privileged, pampered good-for-nothings believe they are all-powerful and untouchable, as with the rest of the Epstein class. They think they can get away with murder. But the mask is dropping, and they are increasingly being exposed as the degenerate parasites they all are.

Revolutionary traditions

Reactionaries, of course, despised Paine. At the time, public effigies of him were hanged by reactionary mobs, then placed on a gibbet post as an example of what should be done to such radicals.

But he never repudiated his views. Paine and the revolutionaries that followed him were undeterred in their historic fight to change society.

Paine's democratic and radical ideas live on. You can imprison and even kill a person, but you cannot stop an idea whose time has come.

When the East London Democratic Association was formed by Julian Harney and other Chartist leaders in 1837, their manifesto declared that its object would be to liberate the working class "by disseminating the principles propagated by that great philosopher and redeemer of mankind, the Immortal Thomas Paine".

Even in the early 20th century, the great American socialist Eugene V. Debs paid tribute to Paine as the founder of the American radical tradition. He is without doubt a part of our revolutionary tradition.

Today, to mark the anniversary of this historic pamphlet, we pay tribute to this revolutionary democrat; this hero of the downtrodden and enemy of the privileged.

In this day and age, the spirit of Paine's ideas are taken up by the communists: fighting for the emancipation of the working class – the exploited multitude – in Britain and internationally; fighting to sweep away the filth of class society, including the Epstein class and its degenerate hangers-on, forever.

WHITHER THE (DIS) UNITED NATIONS?

By Arianna Narine

The smallest unit of human civilization today is the family, in which the children are required to conduct themselves according to the rules set by their parents/guardians and society, and laws of the states in which they live, at least until they attain the age of majority, when their parents'/guardians' control is replaced entirely by the now adults themselves. In the same way, this form of civilized existence is extended to villages and states. Independent nations come together in economic and political alliances with rules that do not only guide their functioning but also regulate their actions, in the interest of and for the benefit of their peoples. Examples are CARICOM, comprising states in the English-speaking Caribbean, Haiti and Suriname; The European Union (The EU) as the name implies a union of European countries; North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military mechanism consisting of countries, supposedly with the same political (and in most cases economic) ideology, and intended to defend each other's sovereignty. In ALL the aforementioned organizations, decisions are made by consensus or vote with the majority prevailing.

Then there is the **UNITED NATIONS**, the successor of the failed League of Nations, which was officially established on the 24, October1945, after the end of the Second World War to, among other things, "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." The UN is built on three pillars, namely peace and security, development, and human rights. The organization's membership is made up of almost all independent countries of the world, –hundred and ninety-three in total,

The United Nations operates through six main organs – the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, the Secretariat, and the now suspended Trusteeship Council. The **GENERAL ASSEMBLY(GA)** is the main deliberative body where all members are equal. The General Assembly convenes for High Level Week (HLW) annually during the month of September attended by Heads of State/Government and Minsters of government, in the absence of the former. In these gatherings, policy statements on world, regional and bloc affairs are enunciated, political positions and intentions are emphasized, alliances are clearly indicated and states' positions on current world events are definitively stated. Smaller nations are given equal opportunity to articulate their needs, aspirations, and views on the global stage at least on this annual occasion. Having said that, "stage" might be the best word to

describe the platform of this gathering. HLW, pontifications and performances aside many important functions are assigned to the General Assembly, including:

Discussions of the budget where a two-third majority for approval is required, and to apportion expenses among states;

Approves the admission of new members to the body, after the recommendation of the Security Council, which also requires a two third majority;

Elections of the non-permanent members of the Security Council, Economic and Social Council and judges to the ICJ.

The appointment of the Secretary-General, following a recommendation from the Security Council.

Decisions, primarily through non-binding resolutions, regarding economic/social development, human rights, and the codification of international law.

Interestingly, the GA can discuss and make recommendations on issues relating to international peace and security, UNLESS the Security Council is handling the matter. The practice is that the Security Council, mainly the P5 (Permanent Five), zealously work to prevent the GA from discussing matters related to peace and security, by claiming to be addressing the matter.

In circumstances where the Security Council fails to act due to a veto by a permanent member, the GA **can adopt measures to recommend collective action**, including the use of armed force, to restore international peace. That said, unlike the Security Council whose decisions are binding on all UN Member States, the General Assembly decisions are non-binding, and so is "without teeth" as it were.

My considered opinion is that many people, worldwide, regard the General Assembly as a waste of time and resources (unaffordable by countries with small economies, whose leaders relish the opportunity to appear on the global stage, have photo ops, make grandiose speeches and pleas for assistance, which hardly anyone listens to) more flair than substance, and is a genuine and snarling example of a "paper tiger".

Ironically, it would have been expected that such an august and prestigious body would have genuine, democratically acceptable and enforceable mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of world peace and security; the adherence to international law and order; avoid incursions of established and settled boundaries; the effective protection of the poor, vulnerable and minorities, sanctions against states (and personally against leaders of such states) for human rights abuses and other such violations; and world order that is humane, non-discriminatory, equitable, transparent and implementable in a timely manner.

By and large, the smallest states comply with treaties, conventions, and the rule of law, but disappointingly it is the larger, powerful states that bully their way and are the leaders in the violations of civilized norms, human rights, peace, stability, and international law.

It would be a meaningful reform of the United Nations for the General Assembly, in the event where the Security Council fails to act, to be invested with the authority to have their resolutions agreed to by a two third vote and binding on all, effectively implemented with oversight responsibility by a committee of experts, one possible from each continent. In this way, States, especially smaller states, not on the Security Council would have a role to play in the United Nations on peace and security, which is not possible in the existing system. Maybe a restructured and renamed Trusteeship Council (whose functions are currently suspended) can execute these functions.

In my opinion, such a reform would result in a more effective, trusted, representative, respected, and democratic institution.

I'll now move on, very briefly, to outline the functions of some of the more known bodies which come under the umbrella of the United Nations:

SECRETARY GENERAL

The Secretariat headed by the Secretary General (SG), who is the chief administrative officer and top diplomat, is elected by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council every five years and is eligible for a renewable second term. This is the chief executive officer and is assisted by tens of thousands of international staff members who carry out the day-to-day functions of the UN. The key functions of the SG include mediating disputes, overseeing and/or operations (as in Haiti) and bringing potential threats of international peace directly to the Security Council.

One would have expected that the words of advice, views and opinions of someone with such stature, experience and international repute would have been given far more prominence and relied upon when making decisions that have far reaching implications, as far as world peace, stability and adherence to international law are relevant. Regrettably, this is not the case and the well-considered statements of the Secretary General (ostensibly on behalf of the majority of countries represented at the UN, and as a consequence of the world) are more often than not, considered as mere utterings, disregarded and discarded by the larger states, especially those with veto powers in the Security Council. In the opinion of this writer, the positions, functions, responsibilities, and the "weight" of the opinions of the Secretary General, must be re-examined, to have a more meaningful and respected world body, to implement and execute the mandates entrusted to it. The regrettable "rubber stamp" description of this important world leader must come to an end.

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

This is the principal body of the United Nations responsible for coordinating the economic, social, and environmental work of FOURTEEN specialized agencies, functional commissions, and regional commissions. This body is made up of fifty-four-member countries and is elected by the General Assembly. It is responsible for promoting higher living standards, human rights, and international cooperation.

The functions of ECOSOC are enshrined in articles 62 to 66 of the UN Charter, and include:

Initiating reports on international economic, social, cultural, health and related matters;

Making recommendations to the UN General Assembly and specialized agencies within the UN system to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Coordinating the activities of specialized agencies, such as the World bank, World Health Organization, etc.

Acts as the forum for discussions and dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's).

Arranging consultations with non-Governmental Organizations to gather expertise and perspectives.

Trusteeship Council

This was established in 1945 to oversee the transition of eleven "trust territories" (former colonies, towards independence and self-government, while ensuring international peace and security, However, the functioning of this Council was suspended on 1st. November 1994 following the independence of Palau, the last remaining trust territory. While the body still exists, it changed its rules to meet only as necessary. (Mentions are made at the end of the discussion on the General Assembly (UNGA) on a possible restructuring and renaming of this Council).

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

This is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations and celebrated its eightieth anniversary in April 2026. It is one of the United Nations bodies that is not located in New York, but at the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands. It was established to settle legal disputes between states and to give advisory opinions to other bodies/organs of the United Nations. ALL one hundred and ninety-three members of the UN are automatically parties to its statutes.

The ICJ is comprised of fifteen judges and has a twofold role:

To settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes between states, submitted to the ICJ by these States, and

To give advisory opinions on legal matters referred to it by duly authorized United Nations organs or specialized agencies.

The judges of the ICJ are elected for a term of nine years, through an elaborate process.

All State parties to the statute of the Court have the right to propose candidates, NOT by the governments of the State concerned, but by a group consisting of the members of the Permanent court of Arbitration designated by the States i.e. by the four jurists who can be called upon to serve as members of an arbitral tribunal under the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.

To ensure continuity, one third (five) judges are elected every three years, during UNGA, and take up their term of office on 6th February, the year following and then have an election, by secret ballot, to elect a President and Vice President, who hold office for three years.

The triennial elections are held in the General Assembly and Security Council, simultaneously, but separately, and to be elected, a candidate must obtain an absolute majority in both bodies. Understandably, this mechanism sometimes makes it necessary for several rounds of voting to be held to determine the membership of the ICJ.

GUYANA/ VENEZUELA border issue: This issue is only ONE glaring example**,** in **MY opinion,** of the ineffective, slothful nature of the International Court of Justice, AND the United Nations, as a logical consequence.

Guyana's neighboring country to the West, has claimed nearly two third (61,600 of 83,000 sq miles) of Guyana's territory in 1962, just before Guyana gained its independence from Britain. Historians of repute, worldwide, have repeatedly stated that Venezuela was encouraged/persuaded/even coerced into making this absurd claim by American and British ruling cliques to ensure another Cuba does not gain a foothold in America's "backyard." The raising of this fictious claim, effectively and finally settled in 1899, was one among a series of acts to prevent Cheddi Jagan and his People's Progressive Party from succeeded in winning back a majority in free, fair, and transparent elections, after independence in Guyana. Regardless of the reason(s) for Venezuela's claim, and not even getting into its legitimacy, the fact is that this matter has been formally engaging the International Court of Justice since March 29th, 2018, when Guyana requested a legal resolution,

maintaining that the 1899 Arbitral Award is valid and binding. This matter had previously engaged other options, including the Good Officer of the Secretary-General, which encountered numerous delaying tactics by Venezuela, leaving Guyana with no option than to request the Secretary-General to seek the ICJ's involvement, as provided for in the Geneva Agreement signed between the two countries in 1966 to resolve the controversy.

Imagine, after so many years, this issue is still not settled. However, closing arguments are now fixed for May 5th. to 8th. this year. Hopefully, a binding decision would be given before the end of 2026 or early 2027.

For such an important body, the relevant resources must be provided to the Court to ensure decisions are made with alacrity. The fact that the Court is seeing an increase in cases referred to it signals the increasing number of challenges facing States but also, positively, their reliance on international law. They should not have to wait for such lengthy periods for decisions by the Court.

Another glaring case of dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in the ICJ is the issue of whether Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, where the latest estimate of civilians murdered is over one hundred thousand, including children, women, medical personnel, journalists, religious persons, etc. **South Africa, later joined by other countries, instituted proceedings at the ICJ on December 29th. 2023 against Isreal for allegedly committing genocide in Gaza.** Any reasonable individual would have thought that such a serious allegation would DEMAND an IMMEDIATE and continuous hearing, UNTIL RESOLVED. But not so, the case, at the time of writing is still far from determined, and the innocent continue to be slaughtered, and in fact, has now spilled over to Lebanon and Iran, with the complicit and active support and involvement of the United States of America.

How can anyone reasonably expect respect and support to be given to a World body such as the United Nations when its institutional mechanisms – in this case its premier judicial organ - is incapable of rendering a speedy decision based on internationally accepted rules for the protection of innocent civilians, unprotected nations and disadvantaged peoples.

While it is fully appreciated that the ICJ needs to make decisions which would be "gilt edged" fair, legally binding on all parties, and which would effectively end all hostilities between the parties involved, it must also be equally understood that extensive delays in resolving these often-complicated issues, considerably retard a country's progress and prolong suffering of civilians.

To avoid any misinterpretation, my point is that the functioning of the ICJ is severely restricted due to a lack of sufficient funding. It is no secret that the president of the ICJ makes annual pilgrimages to plea the case to the membership of the UN for increased funding, especially to employ the appropriate staff numbers to support research and assist the Court to function effectively. It would be hoped that in a world with increasing conflicts and 'a might is right' approach that the Court be given all the support necessary in this regard. Lack of funds, when such massive amounts are being wasted on wars and conflicts, is certainly no reason/excuse for starving the ICJ of the necessary resources to perform its mandate in a more timely manner with the usual credible decisions given.

Funding and other agencies of the United Nations

The United Nations General Assembly approved $3.45 billion as its regular budget for 2026, which is a reduction from previous years ($3.72 billion in 2025) which covers administrative functions and the three core pillars of the organization's work: peace (sic) and security, around 29%, sustainable development, roughly 33% and human rights (again a joke) approximately 38%.

In addition to these "core" operational areas, there are:

Peace keeping missions which seek to maintain peace in internal countries' conflicts, as in Haiti.

Voluntary Contributions (Funds and Programs), in which significant segments of the UN are financed by voluntary contributions. These include UNICEF, World Food Programme

(WFP)—with a mandate to reduce poverty, UNHCR- which caters for the increasing refugee situations in many parts of the world and the UNDP—the UN Development Programme.

In addition, these are the Specialized Agencies: Independent international organizations within the UN system such as the World Health Organization (WHO) International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), funded by member states.

Another layer of the United Nations' structure is the International Tribunal and Special projects, that fund the operations of international courts--ICJ and ICC and international Tribunals, commissioned from time to time to adjudicate on specific disputes.

These bodies have extremely commendable purposes and must be complimented, especially those that help to alleviate poverty, reduce hunger, and intervene in adverse health issues.

Having mentioned the International Criminal Court (ICC), it is necessary to understand that this is in no way related to or associated with the ICJ previously discussed. This is an independent, permanent tribunal situated in The Hague, Netherlands, that investigates and tries individuals accused of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression. It is NOT part of the UN and was established by the Rome Statute and operates as a court of last resort when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute. This court comprises eighteen Judges elected by the Assembly of States Parties for 9-year terms, with the focus being on crimes of international concern.

Of important significance is that many countries are NOT a party to the Rome Statute, and do not recognize the court's jurisdiction. These include China, India, Russia, and the United States.

In recent years, the court has issued arrests warrants for Vladimir Putin, in connection with the invasion of Ukraine,

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Yetanyahu and defense minister Yoav Gallant, along with some HAMAS (acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement) leaders, in connection with the war (or possibly more appropriate, GENOCIDE) in Gaza.

The ineffectiveness of this court is extremely obvious in the inability to execute these issued warrants, especially since there are states that do not recognize their decisions, and as a result the conversation on this court would be very brief,

It would be extremely beneficial if this court, and the ICJ (previously discussed) have time limits, without compromising their integrity, to give decisions within reasonable time frames. It is inconceivable how a decision affecting the lives/survival of millions of people should take more than a year, maximum eighteen months (depending on the severity and effect of the charge) to be delivered. This recommendation is repeated at the end of this article.

The discussion would now continue with what is considered one of the most important bodies of the United Nations, the Security Council. This is the most high-profile body of the entire United Nations and at the same time, in my opinion, the most important. This is the arm of the UN which can do the most to sanction countries for starting wars and other incidents which can and do lead to conflicts, resulting in deaths, destruction, starvation, and untold suffering of millions of innocent people worldwide.

The composition of the Security Council comprises Fifteen members, FIVE PERMANENT members (P5) each of these having veto powers, and ten non-permanent members, elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms, which are distributed geographically, with five elected annually. The P5 members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The decision for these countries to have this preferential status was based on their assessment as the principled victors and major allied powers of World War 11 and their selection at the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta conferences, which were AIMED TO ENSURE THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION (UN) HAD THE ENFORCEMENT POWER TO PREVENT FUTURE GLOBAL CONFLICT. Unfortunately, in recent decades this noble intention is breached, more than observed, especially by some of those given the most important responsibility and privilege of permanency on the Security Council with the added privilege of a veto.

The problem, however, is in almost ALL instances which require urgent action, mainly because of differences in ideologies, economic systems, the fight for regional, continental and global superiority __upmanship, even religious, ethnic and natural resources considerations, the required majority, let alone unanimity, is almost NEVER achieved, with one or another of the P5 members using its veto power to stymie a decision.

Serious, current and existing examples include the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the genocide being committed by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza (who have been without a homeland for nearly EIGHTY YEARS), the war declared by the USA (without its congressional approval as required) and Israel against Iran and further extended by Israel against Lebanon. There are other instances of conflicts in Africa and other parts of the world too, where the Security Council appears to pays little attention or appears unconcerned – Sudan for example, and I must digress here to mention the unconscionable and devastating barriers to trade and economic blockade against CUBA by the United States, despite the General Assembly, voting year after year by overwhelmingly majorities to stop the blockade. Interestingly, but not surprising, in both the Security Council and the General Assembly, the United States and Israel ALWAYS exercise their votes the identical way. Yet these are the countries that preach the gospel of democracy to other countries when in the UNSC of fifteen members, one veto wielding member can upend the fourteen positive votes.

How can these five (P5) members of the UN with a membership of one hundred and ninety-three member states make decisions regarding the lives of billions of people when their combined population is estimated to be 3.283 billion people against a world estimated population of 8.3 billion? Explain where the democracy in this scenario is, when the country having the largest population in the world- India, having 1.5 billion people excluded, and have to do battle periodically for a two-year term, with others in their geographic bloc for a non-permanent seat, when France and the UK with roughly 69 million each, are permanently ensconced there. Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Mexico all have populations in the hundreds of millions. Indeed, in 1945 when the UN was formed there were 51 members, today there are 193. Then there is the glaring injustice where both Africa and Latin America are completely excluded from the permanent membership of the Security Council. Is it any wonder that the mandate of the United Nations to ensure International Peace and Security as well as enforcing International Law is not being achieved? Reform of the Council cannot be postponed. This body must become more representative, accountable, and transparent.

With meaningful reforms, reconfiguration and structural adjustments the UN can easily improve the lives of people in the world in which we live, curb damage to the environment, drastically reduce conflicts and hatred, reduce and even eliminate investments in wars, alleviate poverty, hunger and starvation, prevent genocide, ensure the observance of international law and order prevail, and ensure justice for the majority, poor, disenfranchised and oppressed peoples of the world. The President of the United States recently threatened to bomb another state back to the stone age and destroy their culture and hardly voices of other leaders were raised. The Pope who dared to say it was wrong was severely verbally abused by the offending President and his lackeys. One only must look at the genocide currently taking place in the Gaza, and other parts of the world to form conclusions.

How can it ever be right for the United States to shoot and kill persons in boats as is being done in the Caribbean Sea, without an iota of evidence to prove that the murdered persons were engaged in illegal acts, as alleged? The same is now being replicated in the Strait of Hormuz by the American military.

How can it be legally acceptable for the American military to kidnap sitting Presidents (Venezuelan being the latest) from their homes, take them to the USA, and try them in their courts

for crimes alleged committed?

Are these acts not breaches of the principles of international law offending state(s) can be sanctioned for such breaches?

Shouldn't the Security Council refer some of these matters to the ICJ to adjudicate as provided for in the Charter and shouldn't such decisions be given in a timely manner?

It is recognized that those committing the breaches do not represent the majority of the UN, but the combined voices of the law-abiding states in the UN MUST be heard loud and clear to bring an end to these atrocities. They must NOT cower and tremble in fear of those who have unilaterally assumed the role of the police of the world, while unravelling international law. They must keep in their minds that in unity there is strength. The positions taken by some countries in Europe, Central and South America, Canada and others, can be considered a break from the past, and must be commended. They have confronted the bullies, and the others who are still to get on board must be persuaded to do so. Frontally addressing these issues should be replicated in the UN and its functional supporting bodies and would certainly improve the credibility of the United Nations.

Conclusion and recommendations

Naturally, from the above, I hope that readers will agree that drastic changes need to be made to the rules, structure, and functionality of the United Nations. I would conclude that most people and countries in the world have little confidence in the UN fulfilling its mandate as presently structured and functioning. There are therefore IMMEDIATE need and the will for such a restructuring to take place.

In my opinion, the Security Council MUST be reformed, and these recommendations have been made in some variations in the past:

To include at least three of the ten most populated countries in the world as permanent members with seven additional countries representing geographic constituencies. The fifteen members of the Council would remain. In this reconfiguration, India, a country from Africa and one from the Latin America and the Caribbean, MUST be included in the permanent category. An entire continent- Africa, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean can no longer be excluded from world organization.

The veto power of members can be retained, but some restrictions be included, and one suggestion is that a veto can be exercised by a country ONLY ONCE for a matter being discussed. The veto as presently exists for substantive, non-procedural resolution such as sanctions, peace keeping operations or conflict resolution, MUST be re-examined, as such power, results in significant issues of peace and stability, and the observance of law and order being affected.

Alternatively, if the members of the General Assembly (GA) agree by a majority vote, to have any matter vetoed in the Security Council, referred to it for further debate and resolution, must be acted upon, in accordance with a two third vote in the GA. Decisions made must be binding with sanctions imposed for non-compliance.

The reconstituted Security Council must be empowered to enforce decisions made by other institutions of the UN, such as the ICJ and the ICC. Having said that, another recommendation would be for the Security Council by majority vote (without veto power), be able to refer matters to the ICJ and the ICC for adjudication (the GA has done this on several occasions, as provided for in the Charter), It is also imperative for matters brought before these bodies to be heard and decisions given between ONE YEAR to EIGHTEEN MONTHS (determined by the additional resources mentioned above) of the commencement of hearings. The maxim "Justice Delayed is Justice Denied" must be applied.

While these recommendations, some of which have been previously made, in one format or another, are not exclusive or complete, they are a starting point and must seriously be considered to save the world from annihilation, whether by nuclear means, which is fast becoming a real possibility, or otherwise. If not, the UN itself risks being the casualty.

A final note, after this article was done; Guyana's own Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues – Birkett, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, has been nominated to be the next Secretary General to the United Nations, when the current Secretary General demits office at the end of 2026.

Ms. Rodrigues – Birkett, has a long and rich history of public service, first as the Project Manager of the American Projects at the Poverty Alleviation Programme in Guyana (SIMAP) then as Amerindian Affairs Minister, Foreign Minister, and at the Food & Agriculture Organization before going to the UN, and headed our team on the UN Security Council for the duration of Guyana's term on that body.

She was the first Indigenous person (Amerindian) to hold all the positions mentioned above.

It is hoped that Ms. Rodrigues – Birkett would NOW be the FIRST WOMAN and FIRST INDIGENOUS person to head this prestigious world organization.

GAWU at 50: Continued struggles and success

The fiftieth anniversary of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) represents far more than the passage of time. It marks half a century of organised representation for agricultural and allied workers in Guyana, rooted in a much longer history of struggle, sacrifice, and collective determination. The union's emergence and development cannot be understood outside the broader narrative of labour activism in the sugar industry, a sector that has historically been central to the country's economic life and social formation. Indeed, the recognition of GAWU in the sugar industry was the culmination of more than three decades of agitation, mobilisation, and perseverance by sugar workers and their allies. The journey toward that recognition was marked by profound hardship and, at times, tragic loss. Yet it ultimately resulted in significant gains in wages, benefits, dignity, and social standing for workers across the sugar belt.

The struggle for effective representation in the sugar industry began with the establishment of the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU) in 1946. For decades, sugar workers faced harsh conditions, low wages, and limited protections under colonial and corporate authority. Plantation life was characterised by long hours of physically demanding labour, inadequate remuneration, and limited avenues for workers to assert their rights. Against this backdrop, the desire for a union that genuinely represented workers' interests grew steadily. The then-recognised Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA) had quickly lost its effectiveness and was deemed a company union.

Central to this early struggle was the leadership of figures such as Dr Cheddi Jagan, whose political and labour activism helped galvanise sugar workers and bring international attention to their plight. Alongside his comrades in the labour and political movements, Dr Jagan advocated tirelessly for workers' rights and dignity. The movement for union recognition was therefore intertwined with broader struggles for social justice, political representation, and national independence. It reflected the aspiration of working people not only for better economic conditions but also for a voice in shaping the society

in which they lived.

Among the most defining and tragic moments in this history was the episode remembered as the Enmore Martyrs. In 1948, during a strike by sugar workers demanding improved wages and conditions, colonial authorities responded with lethal force. Five workers—Lallabagee, Pooran, Rambarran, Surujballi, and Harry—lost their lives when police opened fire on unarmed demonstrators at Enmore. Their deaths became a defining symbol of the sacrifices made in the struggle for labour rights in Guyana. The Enmore Martyrs are widely recognised as pioneers in the broader movement for justice within the sugar industry, and their sacrifice continues to occupy a central place in the collective memory of the labour movement.

The Enmore tragedy was not an isolated event. The decades-long struggle for fair representation in the sugar industry witnessed repeated confrontations between workers and the authorities, as well as numerous instances of repression and intimidation. Another deeply poignant moment occurred with the killing of Kowsilla, a housewife who stood in solidarity with striking sugar workers at Leonora. Her tragic killing underscored the dangers faced by those who dared to challenge entrenched systems of exploitation. Kowsilla's killing served as a stark reminder of the human cost associated with the pursuit of justice and dignity.

These tragedies highlight the extraordinary courage displayed by sugar workers, their families, and labour activists during this prolonged struggle. Workers often faced victimisation, dismissal, and harassment for their participation in union activities or labour protests. Families endured economic hardship as breadwinners risked or lost their livelihoods in the pursuit of collective rights. Activists and organisers operated under constant pressure, yet remained committed to advancing the cause of the working class.

Despite these formidable obstacles, the movement for union recognition continued to gain momentum. The perseverance of workers and their supporters ultimately culminated in the formal recognition of GAWU in the sugar industry on February 27, 1976. This recognition marked a turning point in the history of labour relations within the sector. For the first time, sugar workers had a union that they widely regarded as genuinely reflective of their aspirations and concerns.

With recognition secured, GAWU began the complex task of negotiating improvements in wages, benefits, and working conditions for sugar workers. Over time, the union achieved tangible gains that significantly improved workers' and their families' quality of life. Collective bargaining agreements led to enhanced wage structures, improved safety standards, and expanded benefits, including medical coverage, leave provisions, and other forms of social support. These achievements demonstrated the practical value of organised representation and reinforced workers' confidence in the union.

The presence of a strong, credible union also contributed to the broader transformation of labour relations in the sugar industry. Workers increasingly enjoyed greater respect and recognition within their communities and workplaces. Through GAWU, sugar workers developed a collective voice, enabling them to participate more effectively in discussions about policies and practices affecting their livelihoods. The union thus played an important role not only in improving material conditions but also in elevating workers' social status throughout the sugar belt.

However, the post-recognition period was not devoid of challenges. The struggle for workers' rights did not end with the union's official acceptance. Indeed, GAWU and its members faced new forms of resistance as they sought to consolidate their gains and defend the interests of the workforce. One notable episode was the 135-day strike in 1977, during which workers mobilised against policies that they believed unfairly burdened the industry and threatened their livelihoods. The strike illustrated the continued need for organised advocacy and demonstrated workers' willingness to defend their interests through collective action.

Another significant challenge during this period occurred in the 1980s, when GAWU faced derecognition within the sugar industry. This development represented a serious setback for the union and for the workers it represented. Derecognition threatened to undo years of progress and undermined the institutional framework through which workers had asserted their rights. Yet even in the face of this adversity, the union and its membership's resilience remained evident. Workers continued to organise, advocate, and mobilise in defence of their representation, underscoring the depth of their commitment to the principles embodied by GAWU.

Throughout these trials, leadership played a crucial role in sustaining the union's momentum and guiding it through periods of uncertainty. Among the figures who have left a lasting imprint on the organisation, and continue to do so, are Ramkarran, Komal Chand and Seepaul Narine. Their contributions to the growth and consolidation of GAWU over the past several decades have been widely acknowledged within the labour movement. Through dedicated leadership, strategic advocacy, and a steadfast commitment to workers' welfare, they strengthened the union's institutional capacity and expanded its reach.

Under such leadership, GAWU has evolved into a multifaceted organisation that represents workers not only in the sugar industry but also across other sectors of the agricultural and industrial economy. This expansion reflects the union's enduring relevance and its ability to adapt to changing economic and social conditions. At the same time, the organisation's core mission—to defend and advance the interests of the working class—has remained unchanged.

The continued respect and honour sugar workers enjoy within the sugar belt owes much to the collective efforts undertaken by GAWU. By advocating for fair treatment, improved compensation, and safer working conditions, the union has helped elevate the standing of agricultural labourers within Guyanese society. Workers who once faced marginalisation and exploitation now possess a stronger platform through which their concerns can be articulated and addressed.

As GAWU celebrates its fiftieth anniversary of recognition in the sugar industry, it is important to recognise that the union's achievements are inseparable from the sacrifices made by generations of workers and activists. The legacy of the Enmore Martyrs and the memory of Kowsilla serve as enduring reminders of the courage required to confront injustice. Their sacrifices, along with the perseverance of countless unnamed workers, laid the foundation upon which the union was built.

Equally important is the recognition of the leaders and organisers who helped guide the movement through its various phases. Figures such as Dr Cheddi Jagan and Cde Janet Jagan and their comrades provided early inspiration and direction, while later leaders ensured the union's institutional development and continued relevance. Their collective efforts illustrate the importance of visionary leadership in sustaining social movements over long periods.

Today, GAWU stands as one of Guyana's most enduring labour institutions. Its history reflects both the difficulties and the possibilities inherent in the struggle for workers' rights. The union's journey—from a movement fighting for recognition to an established representative body advocating for thousands of workers—demonstrates the transformative power of collective action.

Looking ahead, the challenges facing workers in the agricultural sector remain significant. Economic restructuring, technological change, and global market pressures continue to shape the conditions under which sugar workers operate. In this evolving context, the role of trade unions such as GAWU remains critically important. By providing a platform for collective representation, the union helps ensure that workers' voices remain central to discussions about the industry's future.

In reflecting on fifty years of representation in the sugar belt, GAWU's story may best be understood as one of struggle intertwined with success. The path toward recognition and progress was neither straightforward nor easy. It was marked by sacrifice, persistence, and an unwavering commitment to justice. Yet the achievements realised over the past half-century—improved wages, enhanced benefits, greater dignity, and a stronger collective voice—stand as testimony to what organised labour can accomplish.

Ultimately, the history of GAWU is inseparable from the broader narrative of Guyana's working class. It embodies the aspirations, resilience, and determination of those who labour in the fields and factories of the nation. As the union moves beyond its fiftieth anniversary, it carries forward a legacy forged through decades of struggle while continuing to serve as a steadfast voice for workers throughout Guyana.

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The Paradox of Paradise? –

Social Issues Affecting Young People in Guyana and How It Prevents Them from Taking Advantage of Available Opportunities

By Shivesh Persaud

Young people represent one of the most valuable resources of any nation. Their energy, creativity, innovation, and willingness to adapt to change make them essential contributors to national development. As Panha Vorng once said, "Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the catalyst for change today."

In Guyana, young people are presently living in a period of significant economic growth and transformation, a period no other Guyanese has ever experienced before. The country is witnessing tremendous developments in the oil and gas sector, agriculture, tourism, construction, information technology, health, and infrastructure. These developments have generated numerous opportunities for education, employment, entrepreneurship, skills training and personal advancement.

Guyana has transitioned from a quiet South American nation into the world's fastest growing economy, boasting annual gross domestic product (GDP) expansion rates often exceeding 25% due to the discovery of massive offshore oil reserves. Today more than ever before, young people in Guyana can access scholarships, technical and vocational education programmes, youth entrepreneurship initiatives, sporting opportunities, leadership programmes, and expanding job markets.

The availability of technology and improved communication networks have also opened doors to global learning and employment opportunities. These opportunities undoubtedly have the potential to improve the quality of life of every Guyanese while contributing to the country's social and

economic progress.

Despite these developments, an uncomfortable reality persists beneath the surface of this economic miracle. Youth unemployment rate remains stubbornly high at approximately 25%, and over 35% of young Guyanese fall into the category of "NEET" – Not in Employment, Education, or Training. This is so even when mega-projects are altering the coastline and international corporations are hunting for local talent.

This is not entirely due to structural laziness or a simple deficit of motivation. Instead, it is a complex web of deep-seated social issues ranging from structural mental health crisis, geographic exclusion and systemic deficits that act as invisible barriers.

It must be noted too that the issue is not the absence of opportunities either but rather the existential presence of social challenges that limit access to those opportunities. Social issues can affect a young person's confidence, motivation, education attainment, health, decision-making abilities, and overall capacity to succeed.

In understanding the mismatch between Guyana's newfound wealth and its human capital, it requires exploring how modern social pressures actively prevent young people from engaging with the nation's economic transformation. Understanding these challenges is important because it allows society to identify ways of supporting young people and helping them become productive citizens who contribute positively to national development.

Among the major social issues affecting young people in Guyana are poverty, unemployment, educational inequalities, family instability, crime and violence, substance abuse, mental health concerns, peer pressure, social media influences, and limited community engagement. These challenges tend to create obstacles that prevent young people from reaching their full potential even when there are numerous opportunities available.

Firstly, the juxtaposition defining modern Guyana is a stark macroeconomic paradox: capital is flooding the country, yet human capital is flying out or remaining underutilized.

The Guyana Youth Paradox

Economic Landscape:

- World's fastest growing economy (GDP expansion > 25%)
- Massive local content mandates in oil, gas, & logistics

Youth Landscape:

- Youth Unemployment remains stagnant near 25%
- 35.7% of youth classified as NEET (ILO data)
- Escalating human capital flight via outward migration.

Looking back, historically, the narrative surrounding unemployed youth in the Caribbean has focused on individual choices, framing structural disengagement as personal apathy. However, data from organisation such as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) point toward systemic blockages. While the private sector experiences immense labour shortages across agricultural modernisation, tech services, and maritime operations, young people are pinned down by compounded social crises.

In essence, when a young adult is dealing with systemic domestic instability, untreated psychological trauma, or severe geographic segregation, macro-level economic opportunities seem far away and virtually unattainable.

Core Social Issues Affecting Guyanese Youth

i. Poverty & Financial Hardships

This remains one of the most significant social issues affecting young people in Guyana. Financial hardships impact many aspects of a young person's life, including access to education, healthcare, nutrition, transportation, technology, and recreational activities. This is not denying that the government has made significant inroads in education by investing in new schools and offering the University of Guyana available to all Guyanese free of charge. The same can be said for health too, where numerous health posts and regional hospitals have been constructed across the country.

Many young people from low-income households often face some harsh disadvantages that affect their ability to compete with their peers. A typical example is, some families may struggle to provide school supplies, uniforms, textbooks, internet access, or transportation costs. Although educational opportunities may be available, these additional costs can make participation difficult.

Financial difficulties also create stressful home environments. Some parents who are struggling to meet basic needs may experience anxiety, and frustration, which can affect family relationships and the emotional well-being of children. Young people living in these circumstances may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies or planning for the future.

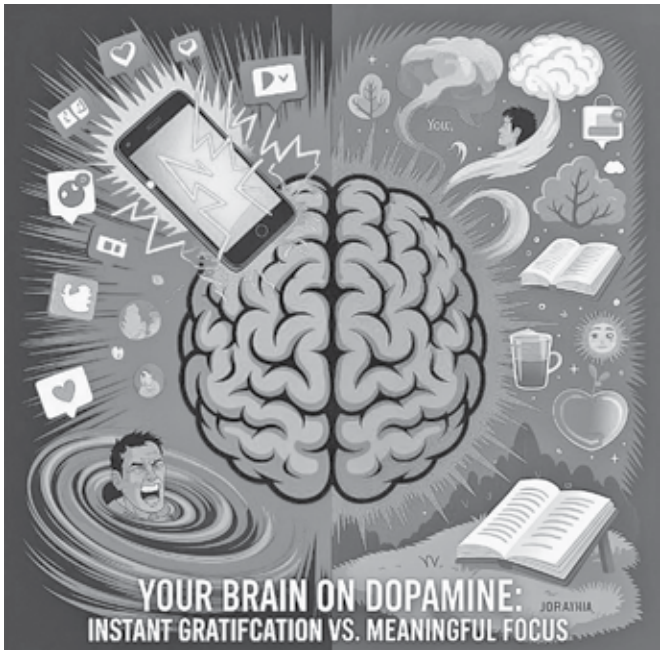
Due to this kind of pressure, many young people are forced into seeking employment at an early age to assist their families, financially. Though earning an income may be necessary for the sustenance of the family, it also reduces the time available for studying, extracurricular activities, or participation in skills-development programmes. In some cases, too, young people may even abandon their education entirely, giving up the opportunity for a better future.

Poverty tends to have a significant influence on one's self-perception. Young people who repeatedly experience financial limitations may begin to believe that success is beyond their reach or unattainable. This lack of confidence can discourage them from applying for scholarships, pursuing higher education, or exploring entrepreneurial opportunities.

ii. Unemployment & Economic Insecurity

The issue of unemployment extends beyond individuals who are unable to find work. It also affects families and communities and has a direct impact on the development of young people.

Young people who grow up in economically insecure



households may feel pressured to contribute financially to their families. This kind of pressure influences their career decisions, and educational choices. Instead of pursuing long-term qualifications that may provide greater benefits in the future, they may choose immediate employment opportunities that offer short-term financial relief.

Some young people also struggle to secure employment because they lack the necessary work experience, professional networks, or specialised skills. Many modern industries require technical competencies and qualifications that some young people have not yet acquired. On the contrary, Guyana has many young people who are excellent welders, mechanics, carpenters, etc, but are lacking a certificate from a recognised institution. This affects them significantly if they are looking to take up jobs in the booming oil and gas sector for example.

Repeated rejection during job searches can negatively affect self-esteem and motivation. This causes young people to become discouraged and lose confidence in their abilities and make them less likely to pursue future opportunities.

Economic insecurity therefore affects both educational achievement and career development, limiting the ability of young people to take advantage of Guyana's expanding economy and realise their full potential.

iii. Educational Challenges and Unequal Access

Education plays a critical role in preparing young people for success. It provides knowledge, develop skills, and equip individuals to participate effectively in society. However, educational challenges continue to affect some young people in Guyana.

Although the government has made educational opportunities available across the country, differences sometimes exist between school and communities. Student in urban areas may have easier access to specialised programmes, libraries, technology, and extracurricular activities than students in more remote regions.

The economic boom is not distributed evenly across Guyana's landscape. The growth is concentrated heavily along the urban coastal strip, specifically the Georgetown, East Coast, East Bank, and West Demerara corridors. For indigenous and rural youth living in the hinterland regions (Region 1, 7, 8, and 9) and riverine communities, these communities remain out of reach to some extent. The same can be said for the Berbice and Essequibo regions where there are some signs of growth and development but still disconnected in some ways.

For the hinterland youth, their isolation is compounded by barriers such as;

- Climate and Environmental shocks: prolonged droughts and seasonal flooding frequently disrupt basic education, safe water supplies, and local healthcare access.
- Infrastructure Gaps: High costs of transport, lack of reliable internet connectivity, and inconsistent electricity grid make digital learning or remote work nearly impossible.
- Economic Migrancy: Young people are often forced to choose between subsistence agriculture or dangerous, unregulated work in informal gold mining, and logging sectors, distancing them further from the formal, modern economy.

Transportation also becomes a challenge for some students. Long travel distances contribute to absenteeism, fatigue, and reduced participation in school activities. Such factors affect academic performance over time.

Another significant issue is school dropout. Some students leave school before completing their education due to financial difficulties, extreme poverty, family responsibilities, personal challenges, or a lack of motivation. Leaving school early limits access to higher education and skilled employment opportunities.

Data compiled by international educational agencies paints a sober picture of student retention and achievement, particularly at the secondary school level.

Academic Level/ Metric	National Disengagement/ Out-of-School Rates
Primary School Age Out of School	Approximately 10%
Lower Secondary Age Out of School	Approximately 18%
Upper Secondary Age Out of School	Approximately 33%
National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) Pass Rate	Historically Under 30%
Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Matriculation	Historically around 31-37% in urban areas

These metrics reveal that one-third of Guyanese youth leave the formal school system before completing upper secondary education. For those who stay, academic performance is heavily impacted by regional inequality. For example, secondary matriculation rates hover near 37% in Georgetown, while they drop roughly around 11% in hinterland areas. A young person who leaves school without passing basic CSEC subjects lacks the foundational literacy, numeracy, and credentials required to enter technical training programmes or pass corporate screening processes.

Another significant issue is the "Doctor or Lawyer, Culture and Skills Mismatches" in Guyana. What does this mean?

For generations, Guyana's societal framework has funnelled top academic performers towards a narrow band of traditional "status professions", primarily medicine and law. This cultural bias leaves a massive blind spot regarding the technical vocational, and managerial skills desperately needed in a modernizing/ technologically savvy economy today in Guyana.

It must be noted that not all young people receive adequate career guidance. Without clear information about available professions, educational pathways, scholarships, and training programmes, many young people may be unaware of opportunities that align with their interests and abilities.

Young people are rarely encouraged to pursue logistics, data analysis, supply chain management, marine engineering, or commercial agriculture. This type of systemic mismatch creates a situation where thousands of underemployed liberal arts or humanities graduates struggle to find a job, while industrial corporations are forced to import skilled labour from neighbouring Caribbean nations or international labour markets to fill technical vacancies, at extremely high costs, which are passed on to the Guyanese consumers.

Educational inequalities do not necessarily mean opportunities are unavailable. Instead, they highlight how social circumstances can make it more difficult for some young people to access and benefit from those opportunities.

iv. Family Instability & Weak Support Systems

Global sociologists like Talcott Parsons and George Murdock established that the family is the primary agent of socialisation, responsible for the initial physical, emotional, and social development of youth. Strong family relationships contribute to emotional security, confidence, discipline, and positive values.

With the presence of family instability many significant challenges will exists. Some young people experience parental separation, domestic disputes, neglect, or limited parental supervision. These circumstances may create emotional distress and affect academic performance and career development.

Children who lack strong parental support tend to struggle with self-discipline and goal setting. They may receive less encouragement to pursue education or participate in developmental activities. As a result, they may fail to recognise or seize opportunities that could improve their futures.

Family instability can also lead to behavioural issues. Young people experiencing emotional stress may become withdrawn, aggressive, or vulnerable to negative influences. Such behaviours interfere with academic success and social development.

Strong family support is essential; it provides the foundation necessary for success. When this support is weakened, young people struggle to take advantage of opportunities available to them.

In the 1981 papal exhortation *Familiaris Consortio,* Pope John Paul II explicitly stated that parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children, and that the family is the first school of social virtues.

v. The Mental Health Crisis & Toxic Environments

Mental health is a critical aspect of overall well-being. However, many young people experience challenges such as anxiety, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

Guyana has historically grappled with one of the highest per-capital suicide rates globally, and this crisis heavily impacts its youth. The demographic between 19 and 25 years old bears a disproportionate burden of this invisible epidemic, notably impacting young males and rural/coastal Guyanese communities.

Academic expectations, family pressures, financial concerns, and social relationships can all contribute to emotional difficulties. In some cases, young people may feel overwhelmed by the demands of modern life.

The drivers are multi-faceted:

- Adversity and Domestic Stress: Studies and local pathology reports identify that nearly half of youth psychological crises are rooted in hard life adversities, including domestic violence and economic/ financial burdens.
- Untreated Mental Illness: Societal shame keeps mental health discussions deeply taboo. A staggering majority of affected youth do not access mental health services available to them or crisis support before reaching a breaking point due to fear of stigma.
- Interpersonal Pressures: Romantic disappointments, family rejection, and acute peer conflicts are amplified within tightly knit local communities, leaving young people feeling isolated without clear paths forward.

These challenges affect concentration, motivation, and productivity. Students may struggle to complete assignments or even prepare for examinations. Young workers also struggle to meet workplace expectations.

Another challenge is low-self esteem which can be particularly damaging. Young people who doubt their abilities may avoid applying for scholarships, leadership positions, internships, or employment opportunities because they fear failure.

When youth are operating in a state of chronic psychological survival, the mental energy required to pursue the opportunities available to them is completely drained. Therefore, mental well-being is an important factor in determining whether young people can take full advantage of available opportunities.

The home environment for many young Guyanese is shaped by high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) and a normalisation of punitive disciple. According to data from UNICEF Guyana, over 70% of adults believe physical punishment is necessary to raise a child.

This normalisation of physical and emotional aggression creates fractured domestic spaces where young people struggle to find safety. Witnessing or experiencing domestic violence leaves deep psychological scars that impair cognitive development, emotional regulation, and self-worth.

Although opportunities are increasingly available to both males and females, gender related expectations can still influence the choices and experiences of young people. For young women especially, the threat of gender-based violence extends into public and workplace spaces, making them hesitant to enter male-dominated fields like construction, maritime logistics, or oilfield services, despite the high wages those industries offer.

Gender stereotypes can limit career choices and discourage individuals from pursuing certain professions or leadership positions. These expectations reduce their confidence and restrict personal ambitions.

When young people feel constrained by traditional expectations, they tend to fail to explore opportunities that align with their talents and interests.

vi. Peer Pressure & Social Influence

Another pressing issue among young people that affects their decision making and influences their thinking process is peer pressure.

Peer groups play a major role in shaping attitudes and behaviour during adolescence and early adulthood. Positive friendships can encourage academic achievement, leadership, and responsible decision-making. However, negative peer influence can have harmful and lasting effects.

Some young people may feel pressured to engage in risky activities in order to gain acceptance. These activities may include substance abuse, truancy, criminal/ illegal behaviour, or other actions that interfere with personal development.

Peer pressure can also discourage ambition. In some situations, young people may fear being criticised for excelling academically or pursuing ambitious goals. This can reduce motivation and limit achievement.

The desire to fit in can lead our young people to make choices that negatively impact their long-term interests. As a result of this, they are more likely to miss opportunities that could improve their future prospects.

Developing confidence and strong decision-making skills are therefore essential for resisting negative influences and making positive choices. Peer relationships can also contribute positively to a person's success and achievement.

vii. Substance Abuse & Gambling

Substance abuse continues to be a challenging factor affecting young people in todays' society. The misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs can have severe consequences for health, education, relationships, and employment.

Same can be said for gambling. In Guyana there is a new trend that has been developing over the past few years where almost every village has a betting shop. On a daily basis passing by these shops, one can see they are always packed with young persons engaging in betting activities.

These kinds of activities lead young people down the path of

experiencing declined academic performance, and increased absenteeism from school or work. Addiction to such activities also reduce motivation, impair judgement, and makes it difficult to focus on long-term goals.

Not only that, but substance abuse and gambling often damage family relationships and friendships. It also leads to financial constraints and increases the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities and risky behaviour.

Many opportunities available to young people whether academically or career wise require commitment, reliability, and discipline. Employers, educational institutions, and training programmes expect participants to demonstrate responsibility and professionalism. Substance abuse and gambling undermine these qualities and reduces the likelihood of success. Domestic abuse (spouse, children and even parents) can also prevent a person from elevating their live and becoming successful.

viii. Digital Saturation, Social Media, and the Dopamine Trap

Technology has transformed communication and created countless opportunities for learning and entrepreneurship. However, excessive or irresponsible use of social media presents challenges for many young people.

As digital connectivity expands rapidly across the coastland, Guyana is confronting a new public health crisis, the psychological impact of digital saturation. Early this year, the Government of Guyana launched a national consultation specifically targeting the negative effects of social media on children and adolescents.

Social media platforms can be valuable tools for networking, education, and information sharing. However, excessive use may lead to distraction and reduced productivity. Time spent online can sometimes replace time that could be devoted to studying, skill development, or community involvement.

Another issue is cyberbullying. Social media and the internet by large have all kinds of people active on a daily basis, as such some persons may become victims of negative interactions. These negative interactions can affect persons' self-esteem and mental health. Victims of cyberbullying are likely to experience anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.

Social media can also create unrealistic expectations about success, wealth, and appearance. The constant exposure to carefully curated images and lifestyles of "influencers" tend to cause young people to compare themselves unfavourable to others.

These comparisons lead to dissatisfaction and discourage individuals from appreciating their own achievements and opportunities. In extreme cases, social media addiction may interfere with academic performance and personal relationships.

The downstream effects of excessive screen time create a self-reinforcing loop of cognitive and emotional harm. It impairs the executive functions of the adolescent prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for long-term reasoning and impulse control. Consequently, the slow, disciplined rewards of real-world advancement such as completing a technical certificate course, learning a trade, or building a business from scratch suddenly feels unappealing compared to the instant gratification of digital platforms.

Therefore, while technology provides valuable opportunities, its misuse can become a barrier to success.

ix. Lack of Positive Role Models/ Mentors

Role models play an important role in shaping the aspirations and behaviour of young people. They often learn through observation, and positive examples tend to inspire their drive for achievement and perseverance. A role model can be anymore, such as a parent, sibling, teacher, community leader, or any exemplary person within the family, community or even beyond that.

Mentors also provide young people with encouragement, advice, and even practical knowledge. They help young people navigate challenges and remain focused on long-term objectives.

However, some young people have limited access to mentors or role models who can guide them through educational and career decisions. Without positive influences, they tend to struggle to envision successful futures or understand the steps necessary to achieve their goals.

When positive role models are absent, young people may become more vulnerable to negative influences that distract them from the abundance of opportunities available to them.

The Psychological Bridge: Why Social Issues Prevent Economic Uptake

To understand the reason why young people are not taking advantage of these new opportunities available to them, it is critical for us to look at the psychological shift from survival mode to long-term planning. Economic opportunities require an individual to invest their current time and energy for a future return. However, severe social issues lock individuals into a state of psychological immediacy.

Survival Mode		**Development Mode**
- Domestic Violence		- Career Training
- Mental Health Stigma	VS.	- Up-Skilling
- Cognitive Exhaustion		- Financial Planning
(FOCUS: NEXT 24 HOURS)		(FOCUS: NEXT 3-5 YEARS)

When a young person's daily life is consumed by constantly navigating domestic instability, managing untreated depression, or coping with geographic isolation, their cognitive bandwidth is fully depleted. Expecting a youth stuck in survival mode to map out a multi-year career path, navigate complex bureaucratic training systems, or maintain the strict discipline required by high-stakes corporate environments misinterprets the reality of human behaviour. The social issues are not merely background noise, they are active, systemic disruptors that break the psychological bridge needed for long-term self

advancement.

Strategic Interventions for National Development

To address the disconnect that exists and to ensure Guyana's youth participate in the nation's economic transformation, the country must look beyond purely economic solutions and implement targeted social reforms.

- Expand community-based, anonymous mental health services outside major urban hubs. Integrate mental health literacy directly into schools and vocational centres, while expanding resources like the National Suicide Prevention Helpline to break down the cultural stigma surrounding seeking help.
- Redesign school curricula to move past traditional career biases. Invest heavily in regional technical institutes that offer targeted training in logistics, digital skills, and advanced agriculture, ensuring hinterland and rural youth have direct, local access to marketable skills.
- Incorporate comprehensive support services such as childcare stipends, transport subsidies, and trauma-informed mentorship directly into state scholarship and employment programs to help young people successfully transition out of survival mode.

Building Resilience and Supporting Youth Development

Building resilience involves developing problem-solving skills, self-confidence, adaptability, and perseverance. Families, schools, religious organisations, community groups, and private sector institutions all contribute to this process.

Supportive environments encourage young people to pursue their goals despite obstacles. Guidance programmes, mentorship initiatives, counselling services, sport activities, and skill-training opportunities can help young people overcome social challenges and maximise their potential.

When communities invest in youth development, they strengthen the nation's human capital and create a foundation for long-term prosperity.

Despite the social challenges discussed, many young people in Guyana continue to demonstrate resilience determination, and ambition. There are numerous success stories that illustrate how individuals have overcome some of the difficult circumstances discussed earlier to achieve educational, professional, and personal success. These individuals and their stories can be great examples of role models for other young people who are still struggling to cope with the challenges preventing them from achieving a better future.

Conclusion

Guyana stands at a pivotal moment in its history, with the financial resources to shape a prosperous, sustainable future. However, the true measure of the nation's development will not be found in its GDP growth rates or oil production volumes, but in the well-being and capabilities of its people.

Guyana offers numerous opportunities for young people through education, employment, entrepreneurship, technology, sports, and leadership development. The country's ongoing economic growth has created possibilities that can transform lives and contribute to national progress. However, it must be noted that the existence of opportunities does not automatically guarantee success.

Social issues such as poverty, unemployment, educational challenges, family instability, crime and violence, substance abuse and gambling, mental health challenges, peer pressure, social media influences, gender-related expectations, lack of role models, and limited community engagement continue to affect many young people. These challenges can reduce access to resources, weaken support systems, lower confidence, and interfere with personal development.

Importantly, these issues do not indicate a lack of opportunities. Rather, they demonstrate how social circumstances can prevent individuals from accessing or fully utilizing the opportunities that already exist. Addressing these challenges requires cooperation among families, schools, communities, businesses, religious organisations, and discipline from young people themselves.

By taking decisive action to address deep-seated social challenges such as mental health crisis, domestic instability, educational inequalities, and geographic isolation, Guyana can dismantle the invisible barriers holding back its younger generation and help them realise their full potential.

Only by building a supporting, accessible framework for its youth can the nation bridge the gap between macroeconomic wealth and real, equitable human prosperity. When young people are empowered to take advantage of available opportunities, they become active contributors to national development and help build a brighter future for themselves, their communities, and the nation as a whole.

Shivesh Persaud

University of Guyana Graduate with a Bachelor's of Science (B.S), Business Administration/Management

Research Assistant to Mr. Donald Ramotar - Former President of Guyana.

Message by
Ambassador Yang Yang

H.E. Donald Ramotar, Former President of Guyana & Former General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party,

Hon. Juan Edghill, Minister of Public Works,

Hon. Clement James Rohee, President of Guyana Peace Council, Former General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party & Minister of Government,

Mr. Devin Mohan, Chairman of the Region 2 Regional Democratic Council,

Mr. Hydar Ali, Chairman of the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre,

Mr. Li Huansong, Captain of the 21st China Medical Team,

Mr. Lian Jihong, President of CNOOC Petroleum Guyana Limited,

My fellow Chinese,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman,

Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to join you here at the Red House, as we mark the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China and the 60th anniversary of Guyana's independence.

Today, we gather here to look back on the shared memories of struggle, discuss the experience in governance, and look ahead to the future of our friendship and cooperation.

The Communist Party of China was founded in 1921. After 105 years of struggle and development, it has grown from just over 50 members at its founding into the world's largest governing party, with more than 100 million members and major global influence. Looking back on the CPC's journey, I would like to highlight three points.

First, the CPC has united and led the Chinese people in achieving national independence and people's liberation.

In modern history, China suffered repeated foreign aggression. The country was poor and weak, and the people endured great hardship. In 1921, the Communist Party of China was born. In the following 28 years, the CPC united and led the Chinese people in strenuous struggles with unyielding determination. It went through the famous Long March, where one Red Army soldier gave his life every 300 meters on average.

They endured the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the War of Liberation, and many other arduous struggles. It overthrew imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, and founded the People's Republic of China.

This experience will surely resonate with our Guyanese friends. The PPP was born in the struggle against colonialism. Both the CPC and PPP know well that the destiny of a country cannot be controlled by external forces. It must be in the hands of its own people.

The first line of China's national anthem is: "Arise, we who refuse to be slaves." The national anthem of Guyana ends with "Land of the Free." These words echo each other across mountains and seas. They express the common pursuit of the two peoples for independence and freedom.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Guyana's independence. China was among the first countries to recognize Guyana's independence and send congratulations. To celebrate this important anniversary, China helped build the China-Guyana

Friendship Park and sent the world-renowned Hebei Acrobatic Troupe to perform in Guyana. China has always supported Guyana's independence.

Second, the CPC has united and led the Chinese people in creating a better life.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China has carried out 15 Five-Year Plans one after another. In just a few decades, China completed a process of industrialization that took developed countries several hundred years. China has created two miracles: rapid economic growth and long-term social stability.

Life expectancy in China has risen from 35 years in the early years of the PRC to 79 years today. A great miracle in human history! Since reform and opening up, 850 million people in China have been lifted out of poverty. This is close to twice the total population of South America. China has contributed more than 70 percent to global poverty reduction.

China has built the world's largest education system, social security system, and health care system. Today, China's economy continues to grow steadily. China contributes about 30 percent to global economic growth. Scientific and technological innovation is making constant progress. The environment continues to improve. China has achieved a great transformation: it has stood up, grown prosperous, and is becoming strong.

The PPP is also committed to serving the people. Dr. Cheddi Jagan devoted his life to promoting social justice and improving people's lives. President Ali has put forward the vision of "One Guyana," so that every citizen can share in the country's development opportunities. Members of the Cabinet often go to the grassroots to solve problems for the people. People-centered development is a common pursuit of both parties.

Third, the CPC has always contributed to world peace and development.

The CPC is a party that seeks happiness for the Chinese people and works for human progress. President Xi Jinping has put forward the vision of building a community with a shared future for humanity. He has also put forward the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the Global Governance Initiative. These initiatives offer China's solutions to the major challenges the world facing today.

China has become the de facto largest contributor to the United Nations' regular budget. It is also the largest troop-contributing country in peace keeping among the permanent members of the UN Security Council. Over the past decade and more, Belt and Road cooperation has expanded to more than 150 countries and over 30 international organizations. In times of major natural disasters and humanitarian crises, whether Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica or the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, China has always stood with the affected people and provided timely assistance within its capacity.

The People's Progressive Party of Guyana also has a strong internationalist spirit. At the ceremony held by the Guyanese government to honor the Enmore Martyrs, everyone sang The Internationale. I was deeply moved.

The Government of Guyana has taken an active part in global governance. It has acted constructively on food security, energy security, climate change and other important issues. During Guyana's term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, it played an important role in upholding international fairness and justice.

Dear friends,

The journey of the CPC offers us many insights. Based on China's practice, I would like to share a few reflections.

First, a party must be deeply rooted in the people and shoulder its historic mission.

The original aspiration and mission of the CPC is to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. The CPC always puts the people in the highest place.

This year, on July 1, eight people out of China's more than 100 million Party members received the July 1 Medal, the highest honor. These recipients are not superheroes. They are ordinary CPC members who have served the people for decades in ordinary posts. Some have served local communities for 30 years. Some have delivered medical care to herders. Some have helped farmers increase their incomes. They did not just speak about the people. They gave their lives to the people.

Let me also take the work of Chinese embassies as an example. Whenever wars, conflicts, or major security risks occur overseas, such as the Syrian crisis in 2011, the Chinese Government immediately organizes evacuations of Chinese citizens first.

The ones who stay until the very end are always Chinese diplomats. The consular protection hotlines of Chinese embassies and consulates are open 24 hours a day. They provide round-the-clock service to overseas Chinese citizens. Every call receives a response. This is our commitment to the people.

Second, a party must strengthen itself and maintain vitality.

The CPC has more than 100 million members and 5.25 million primary-level Party organizations. For a party of such size to stay united and effective, it must strengthen itself. The CPC uses Marxism to arm the whole Party through intra-Party education and other means. This ensures that the cause of the Party moves in the right direction.

The CPC fights corruption with a zero-tolerance attitude. The CPC stresses that Party discipline is no small matter. Party

members and officials must not only set an example in obeying national laws. They must also strictly follow Party discipline.

For example, I myself am not allowed to engage in business activities, use my position as ambassador to seek favors or assistance for my relatives, or accept gifts from individuals or entities under my supervision or with whom I have official dealings.

A foreign scholar once said, "In terms of self-governance, the CPC has set an example for political parties around the world."

Third, a party must uphold independence and follow the path of peaceful development.

The CPC has proceeded from China's own national conditions and followed the trend of era. It has successfully initiated the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Chinese modernization has expanded the pathways for developing countries to achieve modernization.

There is an old Chinese saying: "Only the wearer knows if the shoes fit." China respects the right of all countries to choose their own development paths based on their own national conditions and the will of their people. We believe that there is no single model of development that fits all countries. Differences should not be judged through an ideological lens, and developing countries should not be lectured to or interfered with from a position of superiority.

China has always followed the path of peaceful development. Chinese culture values harmony. Peace, amity and harmony have been pursued and passed on by the Chinese nation for more than 5,000 years. China will never seek hegemony just because it has grown strong. China always believes that only when the world does well can China do well. China is ready to work with all countries, especially countries of the Global South, to achieve common development and progress through peaceful coexistence, exchanges, and mutual learning.

Dear friends,

China and Guyana are far apart geographically, but our peoples have a long history of exchanges and deep friendship. Over the 54 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China-Guyana relations have grown stronger with time. Political mutual trust has continued to deepen. Cooperation has produced fruitful results. People-to-people exchanges have continued to expand. China and Guyana are good friends who respect and support each other, good partners who work closely together for common development, and good brothers with deep affection and mutual understanding.

Inter-party exchanges are an important part of China-Guyana relations. In 1962, Janet Jagan, then General Secretary of the PPP of British Guiana, visited China despite obstruction from the colonial authorities. She was warmly received by Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai. This became an important chapter in the history of friendship between our two parties.

In 2021, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee held a video call with Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, General Secretary of the PPP. Last October, PPP Central Executive Committee Member H.E. Donald Ramotar, and Hon. Clement Rohee, visited China. In recent years, the International Department has invited PPP representatives to visit China every year. They include officials responsible for local affairs, youth, women, and publicity. On important occasions such as national congresses of the two parties, the two sides have exchanged congratulatory messages. This fully shows the traditional friendship and political mutual trust .

Today, changes in the world are unfolding at a faster pace. The international situation is marked by both change and turbulence. Global challenges keep emerging. The stronger the winds and waves, the greater the need for us to pull together. Political parties are important forces for human progress. They must stay on the right course and shoulder the historic responsibility.

Looking ahead, the CPC is ready to maintain close exchanges with the PPP. We are ready to deepen exchanges and mutual learning on state governance, poverty reduction and development, youth training, community-level work, ethnic unity, and party building.

China is ready to work with Guyana to translate the common ground in the two parties' governance philosophies into tangible results in bilateral cooperation. We will further deepen cooperation in infrastructure, energy, agriculture, health, education, the digital economy, green development, and people-to-people exchanges, so as to better benefit our two peoples.

As important members of the Global South, our two sides can also strengthen communication and coordination in international affairs. Together, we can uphold the common interests of developing countries and promote a more just and equitable international order.

Finally, let us wish the Communist Party of China a happy 105th anniversary. Let us wish Guyana a happy 60th anniversary of independence. Thank you!

Chinese Ambassador H.E. Yang Yang is the current Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Guyana. She is a diplomat and university graduate.

More Than Oil: Why Guyana Must Protect the Industry That Is Transforming the Nation

There are moments in the life of a nation when history presents an opportunity so profound that future generations will judge not whether we seized it perfectly, but whether we seized it wisely.,Guyana is living through such a moment.

Much has been written about the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement signed with ExxonMobil and its partners-CNOOC Petroleum Guyana Ltd. and Chevron. To many Guyanese, it remains an imperfect contract. Critics point to the 2 per cent royalty, the generous cost recovery provisions and other fiscal terms that, viewed in isolation, undoubtedly favour the investor. Those criticisms are understandable. But to judge Guyana's oil industry solely by the percentage of oil revenues flowing into the Treasury is to miss the total picture. It is as if one is judging a mighty tree only by the fruit hanging from its branches, while ignoring the cover it provides, the roots that bind the soil together and the countless forms of life that flourish because it exists. The real value of Guyana's petroleum industry cannot be measured only in barrels of oil or billions of dollars deposited into the Natural Resource Fund. Its true value is measured in the opportunities that are generated by the industry.

Since production began in December 2019, oil revenues have financed roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, housing schemes, electricity expansion, water projects and other public investments on a scale previously unimaginable. Entire communities are benefiting from improvements that would once have taken generations to achieve. But the industry's greatest contribution may not be the money paid directly to Government. It is the economic juggernaut that has enveloped it.

Thousands of Guyanese now earn their livelihoods because of the petroleum sector. Hundreds of local companies have expanded or been created to provide transportation, logistics, fabrication, engineering, environmental services, catering, accommodation, construction, security and countless other services. Young Guyanese who once believed they would have to migrate in search of opportunity are now building careers at home. Engineers are being trained. Technicians are acquiring world-class skills.

Small businesses are becoming major enterprises. Banks are lending more. Hotels are coming on stream. Ports are being modernised. Universities are expanding programmes to produce graduates for industries that did not exist a decade ago. This is how nations become prosperous —not merely through government income, but through broad-based economic transformation.

It is also worth remembering the circumstances under which the agreement was signed. In 2015, ExxonMobil, CNOOC and its then partner, Hess, announced the Liza discovery, one of the largest offshore oil discoveries of modern times. Almost immediately, Venezuela revived and intensified its claim to Guyana's maritime space, issuing decrees that sought to extend its jurisdiction into waters where the discoveries had been made.

Guyana was a small country confronting a much

larger neighbour that has never abandoned its claim to the Essequibo. Against that backdrop, the Government negotiated an agreement that has often been criticised for giving away too much. Yet there was another, existential, consideration.

Former Minister of Natural Resources Raphael Trotman has publicly acknowledged that geopolitics influenced those negotiations. Ensuring that one of America's largest multinational corporations had a substantial presence offshore Guyana, meant that the country's security became intertwined with significant United States commercial interests. That was not simply an economic calculation. It was a strategic one. Some may disagree with that approach. Others may argue that Guyana could have secured stronger fiscal terms while still achieving the same geopolitical objective.Reasonable people can differ. What cannot reasonably be disputed is that the presence of ExxonMobil and its partners has fundamentally changed the international significance of Guyana's offshore territory. History suggests that governments, particularly powerful ones, pay close attention when major national economic interests are involved.

From Guatemala in 1954, where Jacobo Árbenz's reforms collided with powerful American agricultural interests, to Chile following Salvador Allende's nationalisation of the copper industry, and more recently the prolonged confrontation between Washington and Nicolás Maduro's oilrich Venezuela, natural resources have frequently occupied the centre of hemispheric politics.

Guyana's circumstances are very different from each of those cases, and simplistic comparisons should be avoided. Nevertheless, history reminds us that energy, strategic resources and geopolitics are rarely separated. Today, the United States is one of Guyana's most outspoken diplomatic and security partners in supporting the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The presence of major American and Chinese investments has undoubtedly become one important element within Guyana's broader strategic relationships.

This is why the calls being made for unilaterally reopening the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement deserve careful thought. Such proposals are often emotionally satisfying, but they are not necessarily practical. The agreement itself contains stability provisions that prevent Guyana from changing its terms without the written consent of ExxonMobil Guyana Limited and its partners. Those provisions were specifically designed to give investors confidence that the rules would not change after billions of dollars had already been committed. ExxonMobil has repeatedly stated that it will not renegotiate the agreement. Nor should that surprise anyone.

Businesses invest where contracts are honoured. Countries prosper when their word carries weight. If Guyana were to disregard legally binding commitments after more than US$50 billion has been invested, the consequences would extend far beyond one contract. No future investor—whether in oil, mining, manufacturing, tourism or infrastructure—would take the risk as to whether agreements signed today might be rewritten tomorrow. That is not a reputation any developing nation should have.

Fortunately, Guyana no longer negotiates from the position it occupied in 2016. The entire world now knows about the glaring value of the Stabroek Block. Future petroleum licences are already being negotiated on stronger terms, reflecting the country's vastly improved bargaining position.

That is exactly how successful resource-rich countries evolve. They learn, they improve and they negotiate better. But they must also honour commitments already made. The debate, therefore, should no longer be trapped in the past.

Instead of asking how to rewrite yesterday's agreement, Guyanese should ask how to maximise today's prosperity for tomorrow. How do we educate our people for the industries of the future? How do we grow local businesses to compete internationally? How do we convert temporary oil wealth into permanent national development? How do we ensure that long after the last barrel of oil has been produced, Guyana remains prosperous because of the institutions, infrastructure, businesses and

human capital that oil helped create? Those are the questions that will define our future.

The Production Sharing Agreement will never satisfy everyone. History will continue to debate whether Guyana gave away too much. But history is also likely to remember something else. The agreement that many considered the country's greatest concession also unlocked the greatest period of economic transformation Guyana has ever experienced. The real challenge before us now is not to relitigate the past. It is to ensure that this extraordinary opportunity becomes a permanent legacy for generations of Guyanese yet unborn. But future prosperity notwithstanding, no contract involving a nation's natural resources should ever be beyond public examination. Furthermore, debate is the hallmark of a mature democracy. As Guyana continues its remarkable transformation, it is natural—and indeed healthy—that citizens scrutinise the agreement that unlocked the country's oil wealth. Yet, fairness demands that history judge the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement within the context in which it was signed.

It was negotiated only months after the Liza discovery had transformed Guyana from an obscure frontier basin into one of the world's most exciting petroleum provinces. Almost simultaneously, Venezuela intensified its objections to exploration activities in Guyana's offshore waters and renewed its campaign to assert jurisdiction over maritime areas off the Essequibo coast. The Government of Guyana was therefore confronted with an extraordinary challenge: how to develop a world-class petroleum resource while safeguarding the sovereign rights of a small State facing a threatening and avaricious neighbour.

It is in that context that former Minister of Natural Resources Raphael Trotman has explained that the negotiations were influenced not only by commercial considerations but also by geopolitical realities. The objective was not simply to attract investment, but to attract investment of such strategic significance that Guyana's lawful offshore activities would become closely associated with the interests of one of the world's largest energy companies and, by extension, command greater international attention.

Whether every element of that strategy was optimal will, and should, remain a matter of legitimate and reasoned debate. What is difficult to dispute, however, is that the presence of ExxonMobil and its partners has fundamentally altered Guyana's strategic environment. Their massive investments have helped draw sustained international attention to the security and stability of Guyana's offshore petroleum operations at a time when Venezuela continues to challenge the country's territorial integrity.

History offers many reminders that natural resources have often shaped international relations in our Western Hemisphere. The overthrow of Guatemala's Jacobo Árbenz in 1954 following disputes involving the United Fruit Company, the political upheaval that followed Salvador Allende's nationalisation of Chile's copper industry, and the prolonged confrontation between successive United States administrations and Nicolás Maduro's oil-rich Venezuela, all demonstrate that strategic resources frequently occupy an important place in regional geopolitics. These events arose from very different historical and political circumstances and should not be treated as direct parallels with Guyana. They do, however, illustrate that governments often attach considerable importance to major national economic interests abroad.

Against that backdrop, the ruling PPP-Civic's decision to preserve the sanctity of the Production Sharing Agreement after the change of government in 2020 was more than an exercise in legal prudence. It was a reaffirmation that Guyana is a country that honours its obligations, respects the rule of law and understands that investor confidence is earned through consistency, not convenience. That reputation has become one of Guyana's greatest strategic assets. It has encouraged billions of dollars in additional investment, accelerated the development of multiple offshore projects, expanded opportunities for Guyanese businesses and workers, and strengthened confidence that Guyana is a reliable destination for international capital.

None of this suggests that future agreements should mirror the terms of 2016. They should not. Guyana's bargaining position has changed

dramatically, and future contracts should continue to reflect the country's enhanced leverage and accumulated experience. But neither should the nation undermine the legal certainty upon which its remarkable economic progress has been built. The real measure of success will not be whether Guyana eventually proves that it could have negotiated a better agreement in 2016. Undoubtedly it could have. But success will be judged by whether the wealth generated by that agreement creates better schools and hospitals, modern infrastructure, competitive local businesses, a highly skilled workforce, stronger institutions and opportunities for generations yet unborn.

In that sense, the Production Sharing Agreement was never only about oil. It was about positioning a small nation to secure its economic future, reinforce its international credibility, strengthen its strategic resilience and transform a once-in-a-generation natural resource discovery into lasting national prosperity. That is the legacy by which it should ultimately be judged.

Emmanuel Fiedtkou

Fiedtkou is ever so grateful - to Exxon

Mr. Emmanuel Fiedtkou has written a long defence of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. He concedes the critics have a point. He concedes no oil contract should be beyond public examination. Then he spends five thousand words telling us to stop criticising it. And he hates numbers, or reality, or both.

In 2025 the three Stabroek companies made G$2.52 trillion before tax. Guyana's half share of profit oil was G$451 billion. For every dollar this country earned, they took five dollars fifty. Over six years they made G$8.58 trillion before tax. We received G$1.58 trillion. Hess alone, on a 30 per cent share, has piled up more money than our entire national budget.

It is worse. Their income tax over those six years came to G$1.56 trillion. Under Article 15.4 we pay that tax out of our own profit oil, and our profit oil was G$1.58 trillion. Take one from the other and the nation is left with G$22 billion. That is the Natural Resource Fund - the patrimony we are told is held for our grandchildren. He calls his article the total picture. It contains no numbers.

Fiedtkou says judging the industry by revenue is like judging a tree by its fruit and ignoring its shade - the jobs, the contractors, the engineers who no longer leave. The shade comes from the industry. The fruit comes from the contract. Not one welder would have lost a day's work if the royalty were 10 per cent instead of 2. Not one hotel would have gone unbuilt if Exxon paid its own taxes like every other company here. The jobs came with the oil, not with our generosity. He wants us grateful for a trade we never made.

Fiedtkou says the soft terms bought us American protection. Strategy, not weakness. Trotman has told us he was ordered to sign. A man told to sign weighs nothing. Exxon is here because it found Liza. Does Fiedtkou believe that the biggest oil company on earth walk away from the best barrels it owns over ordinary terms?

Fiedtkou seems to take the American line. May I remind him that America made a trade deal with Canada and Mexico. On 1 July, three weeks ago, Trump refused to renew it. When that deal was written, American Congressmen objected to the review clause. They said it would frighten investors - word for word what the American Ambassador tells us here. America put the clause in anyway.

Then there is Iran. Obama made a deal in 2015 to control Iran's nuclear programme. Five other world powers were part of it. The United Nations backed it unanimously. In 2018, Trump said the deal gave away too much, and walked out. Iran had not broken it. In February this year America bombed Iran. Last month it began negotiating a new deal. See the pattern? Sign it. Walk out. Bomb them. Start again.

The same country whose ambassador warns us that questioning a commercial contract sends the wrong signal. There is a word for what the US is doing. It is called hypocrisy.

Big countries change their minds whenever it suits them. Small countries are told never to change theirs at all. And we are not asking to walk out of anything. We are asking to use a clause our own contract gives us. And what is Fiedtkou asking us to do? To demonstrate weakness and spinelessness.

He praises this Government for keeping the Agreement sacred. Here is the result, Emmanuel. Not one ministerial audit completed. US$211 million of disallowed costs quietly negotiated away. Exxon now trying to pick the Sole Expert, which the Agreement forbids. No ring-fencing. Gas costs drifting into cost recovery where they do not belong. Tax certificates issued for money the National Estimates show was never paid to the GRA.

Exxon can breach the Agreement. But we dare not open it. That is not respect for the rule of law. It is obedience with a legal vocabulary.

Fiedtkou asks how we turn oil into schools and institutions. Then look around. One piece of real business in Parliament in eight months. No Public Accounts Committee. No Petroleum Commission. A gas project that has swallowed US$82 million in arbitration and G$19 billion more since the Budget.

There is a name for a country whose institutions hollow out as the money arrives. It is the resource curse. It does not begin with stolen billions - that comes later. It begins when Parliament stops sitting, when watchdogs never bark, and when telling the truth about a contract is called disloyalty.

These are taking place before our eyes. His article is written as though none of it had.

Walter Van Gravesande

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE RULES-BASED ORDER - ITS RELEVANCE AND APPLICABILITY IN CONTEMPORARY AFFAIRS, WITH REFERENCE TO CUBA

Thank you, Mr. Moderator and good afternoon to the audience. I am honored to be included on such a distinguished panel; I told the moderator that he had the precedence wrong, listing me before a former President and General Secretary, but then I realized that it was the order of the presentations on the program, it had nothing to do with precedence, for which I am relieved, having a former President, a senior academic and a distinguished Ambassador presenting also.

The moderator has tasked me with a formidable topic: I'm supposed to talk about international law and the "rules-based order" in today's world, looking at Cuba in particular, and to put that in a historical context of previous threats, as well as current threats of military intervention, and other subversive measures – so that is military and non-military. Well, we could talk all afternoon about that alone but he has given me a time-limit.

So, what I propose to do is to take a retrospective look, make some comments based on what the law states, and bring things into contemporary, present-day relief.

I don't want to go as far back as the Spanish-American War of 1898, as a result of which Spain lost much of its foothold in the Caribbean, nor to look at some of the later agreements that were signed…that's how we ended up with Puerto Rico being part of US territory and of course, Guantanamo Bay on Cuba…

Anybody can recall the Bahia de Cochinos? No? The Bay of Pigs invasion, in the South of Cuba?

The Bay of Pigs invasion took place in April 1961…16 years after the 1945 San Francisco Conference that birthed the UN, and

Member States signed off on the UN Charter. The US was the host of that event, and is the host country for the organization which is supposed to uphold the maintenance of international peace and security.

This invasion was a US military operation, supported by a blockade of the island: there were Cuban exiles opposed to Fidel Castro's Ruiz's revolution, trained and supported by the US. It was not unlike in Guyana around the same time in the 1960's, the role of the CIA is well documented in the attempts to destabilise Cuba.

The invasion plan had been devised under US President Dwight Eisenhower and included air and naval support, however John F. Kennedy became President in January of 1961 and in the wake of international concern over the planned invasion, he stood down the air support. The invasion force was about 1500 exiled militia, trained by the US but they were no match for the 25,000 Cuban soldiers and, without the additional air and naval support, the invasion was defeated.

The significance of this is manifold, but let me just say that the humiliating defeat of the great Hemispheric power has been etched into the Cuban psyche, contributing to the resilience and anti-American sentiment emanating from Havana up to this day.

So let's look at the rules: Article 1 of the UN Charter talks about the maintenance of international peace and security, suppression of acts of aggression, peaceful settlement of disputes. The Charter includes principles of non-intervention, the right to self-determination, no resort to use of force, all these are foundational aspects of the Charter, in Article 1, Article 2(3) and 2(4), and those rules of international conduct were all violated in 1961 by the host of the San Francisco Conference. Why? Well the Cold War, the ideological confrontation between the US and the USSR was raging… basically Russia is what's left of the USSR… and Fidel Castro's communist revolution was backed by the USSR; in fact the invasion led to a further cementing of relations between Havana and Moscow. In other words back then, ideology "trumped" (pardon the pun) concerns about the principles of international law and the UN Charter

Beyond the Bay of Pigs invasion, there have been any number of subversive measures – as I said the theme contemplates military and non-military action – taken or orchestrated by the US against Cuba. There have been all manner of attempts to destabilise the government – the CIA has been active over the years – I told somebody last week that I saw where they are back and meeting with local officials, reportedly including Raul Castro's grandson and the person wryly said, but the CIA never left!

Attempts at assassination of Comandante Castro are well documented and they have even been fictionalized: 638 Ways to Kill Castro is a documentary that aired on UK television, named after a report from Fabian Escalante, a retired chief of Cuba's counterintelligence, who had estimated the number of asassination attempts to be 638! You hear stories for example, of Fidel not sleeping in the same place twice in succession. In 1976, US President Gerald Ford issued Executive Order 11905 banning political assassinations.

Perhaps the most infamous of all however, is the economic embargo against Cuba: the embargo is not only aimed at Cuban citizens and businesses, precipitating a humanitarian catastrophe, but also against foreign companies that do business in Cuba which are then sanctioned and restricted from doing business in the US. Let me just say that the shortsightedness of this policy is that it allows European and other companies less competition, as US firms are prohibited from providing good and services, for example in the tourism and hospitality sector.

These sanctions have been written into law in the US, such as the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, and the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which targets the sale of property by foreign companies formerly owned by US nationals, that had been confiscated in the revolution. Examples are financial and economic sanctions that block the access of Cubans to money held in US accounts and access to financial and money transfer services in the US. Sanctions are regularly imposed on American companies that do business with Cuba, although these have been eased or varied from time to time. Fast forward to today, and we see a recent wave of sanctions against President Miguel Diaz-Canel and his immediate family and senior government officials and a crippling fuel embargo that has brought lengthy backouts and hardship on the Cuban people and economy.

The US embargo against Cuba has been the subject of a United Nations General Assembly resolution entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", for 33 consecutive years now, with the overwhelming majority of Members voting in support every year. Last year the vote was 165 for, 7 against and 12 abstentions.

The purists would say that a General Assembly resolution, unlike those from the Security Council, is non-binding. While in the strict sense that is so, it cannot be denied that the passage of a resolution, for three decades now, by an overwhelming majority of the members of the international community, ought not to be ignored, as it indicates the isolated position in which the US finds itself on this issue.

And what has been Washington's response all along? The embargo is a bilateral matter between the US and Cuba and does not involve the breach of rules of international law and the UN Charter that the resolution contemplates. In any event, as the embargo has been written into US law, it would require an act of Congress to lift it, which would in turn be tied to requirements on representative democracy and compensation for previously confiscated US-owned property.

Other forms of non-military subversion include visa diplomacy against President Castro and other high-ranking Cuban government officials. You should note however that

Heads of State who wish to go to New York to address the UN are not normally denied a visa – I myself have been there at the UN when Presidents Ortega, Maduro and Mugabe attended, while under sanctions.

So what is it that has led to this latest wave of US "aggression" against Cuba, besides President Trump saying that "Cuba is next"?

Three weeks ago, the US charged former President Raul Castro with conspiracy to commit murder, murder and destruction of aircraft, all in connection with the 1996 downing of two airplanes belonging to the Cuban-American group Brothers to the Rescue, over the waters between the US and Cuba.

Let me say at the outset that there is some dispute over where exactly the planes were, whether they were in international airspace, as claimed by the US, or had already violated Cuban airspace, as Havana has consistently asserted. This bears directly on one's assessment of the legality or otherwise of the action taken: I myself have seen a map with two different locations of the aircraft and each supports the contention of the respective sides.

There are also disputed facts as to whether this was a pattern of violations of Cuban airspace that Brothers to the Rescue had systematically carried out, including dropping of propaganda leaflets over Havana – even that is in dispute, whether the planes were actually over Havana, or were at an elevation sufficient enough on a windy day, for the leaflets to have been blown towards Cuba!

Also, whether warnings were given by the Cuban authorities to the planes, whether they could have escorted them out of national airspace, assuming they were over Cuban territory, rather than resort to the use of lethal force against unarmed civilian aircraft; whether Brothers to the Rescue were involved in subversive activity against the Cuban government. Of course, depending on the facts, the application of the rules of international law would differ, relating for example, to Cuba's right to self-defence, or whether in exercising that right, the force used was disproportionate to the alleged threat.

Recently we have been discussing what some have termed brooch-gate, with Delcy Rodriguez wearing the jewelry with the offensive map of Venezuela with the Essequibo included, but I don't know how many will remember former US Ambassador (later Secretary of State) Madeleine Albright, who pioneered the use of brooches as part of her diplomacy. It is said that the Iraqi press had described her as "an unparalleled serpent" because of her strong criticism of their foot-dragging with weapons inspectors. Thereafter, she always wore a brooch in the shape of a coiled snake whenever she was negotiating with the Iraqis.

In that vein, Ms. Albright when addressing the media on the Brothers to the Rescue incident, wore a bluebird pin pointing

downward, as a mark of respect for the persons killed in the incident. In that address also, she introduced the Spanish word "cojones" into the diplomatic lexicon, what we sometimes more delicately refer to as "testicular fortitude". The word cojones means balls, testicles in English, but Ms. Albright wasn't being vulgar at all…in fact she was repeating what had reportedly been overheard in transmissions between the Cuban pilots after the shooting occurred, celebrating that "We blew their balls off". The record will show that the language overheard in all the exchanges was much more flowery than that! In response. Ms. Albright had famously said of the downing of the planes, "This is not cojones, it is cowardice"

So why Raul Castro? Well he was Minister of Defence at the time and there are reports of an audio recording from June 1996 in which he allegedly instructed the Cuban Air Force pilots to "shoot them down over the sea when they appear".

So under the international law of responsibility, actions such as this carried out by the military are attributable to the state, in this case, Cuba. That is at the level of inter-state relations; however at the individual level, the US could assert its jurisdiction in respect of acts that injure or, in this case, kill US nationals or damage US property and would hold Raul Castro personally liable under US jurisdiction for those acts.

So, why now? Well besides the fact that the US had once held Fidel, not Raul Castro responsible for this incident, the US believes that Cuba is at an inflection point now and is seeking to exploit its perceived vulnerabilities. So they believe that going after the 94 year old Raul Castro would be a significant development – never mind the question of how would Raul be able to appear in a US court to answer the charges. One wonders, another Maduro-type operation?

In so far as the rules-based order goes, there have been examples through the course of contemporary history which challenge the integrity of that order. Grenada in 1983 and Panama 1989, were invasions under the guise of "humanitarian intervention", to safeguard the lives of American citizens. But the concept of humanitarian intervention is not fully embraced in international law, especially in these two instances where it appeared to be the pretext for regime change. The mining of the Nicaragua harbor and US support for the Contras was another example which led to Nicaragua filing a case against the US at the ICJ in 1984. While the court found in favour of Nicaragua, the US never paid court-ordered compensation, using its veto in the UN Security Council to block enforcement of the judgment.

In March 2003 Antigua and Barbuda sought redress against the US through the World Trade Orgaanisation (WTO) Dispute Resolution procedure over an issue related to internet gambling. After a protracted period of litigation, the WTO made a monetary award in favour of Antigua and Barbuda worth US$21 million annually, which the US has to date never honoured. The US of course, was one of the countries in 1994 that had urged developing countries such as ours to sign up to the global free trade regime under the WTO; so much for the merits of the rules-based system of free trade, especially when you don't like how those rules affect you!

Even the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the succession of Russia to the permanent seat on the UNSC was a situation crafted to a large extent out of necessity and expediency, on an uncertain and unprecedented legal footing. Russia's 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea and the so-called "special military operation" in the Ukraine in 2022, so styled to avoid the legal consequences of a formal declaration of war, are hard to fit neatly within the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference and non-intervention.

Closer to home, more recent events during the second term of President Donald Trump's presidency paint an uncertain picture of what might be planned as regards US policy toward Cuba. There have been threats to annex Canada, Greenland and Venezuela, apparently without regard for the rules on non-intervention, territorial sovereignty, the acquisition of territory, or the right to self-determination of the residents of those countries.

The activities in 2025 off the coast of Venezuela that resulted in the death of civilians and the destruction of property, in circumstances where there was no investigation, no evidence and no corroboration, do not in my estimation, meet the threshold for what constitutes either a threat or use of force by small fishing vessels a thousand miles away from mainland United States in Florida, that could possibly justify the use of force by the US in retaliation as an act of self-defence. I am of course aware that over in Trinidad and Tobago, the distinguished Attorney General has publicly stated that he sought expert legal advice outside of the Chambers and the opinion was that the activities conform with international law, a view which was subsequently repeated by the Hon. Prime Minister, herself a Senior Counsel, in the Parliament. No doubt that's why in legal matters there is always opposing counsel to offer a different view.

It must be recalled that the UN Charter was concluded in 1945, 80 years ago. Article 51 stipulates that the right to self defence is only available if 'an armed attack occurs', that is, actual force must be used, and the attack must have already occurred. Whereas that right would have been available to Cuba during the Bay of Pigs invasion, it is submitted that it was not available to the US last year, off the coast of Venezuela, where there was neither a threat to the US, an imminent threat, nor an attack on US soil or assets.

In addition, as time and technology have marched on, the use of cloud-forming chemicals, cyberattacks, the weaponising of food and humanitarian aid, as we saw in Gaza, and now the latest manifestation, restricting of fuel supplies to Cuba… these are all examples of contemporary warfare which were not in the contemplation of the narrow definition of "armed attack". The closing of the Strait of Hormuz, without a shot being fired, could probably have widespread debilitating effects on the population and economy of both combatant and non-combatant states, as would a bombing raid.

I said that under Article 51, the armed attack must have occurred: there have been reports that US forces attacked Iranian coastal surveillance radar sites "to defend against further maritime attacks". It should be noted that there is much writing on the law relating to the use of force, which frowns on what some refer to as anticipatory or preemptive self-defence.

While the practice of states in the UN has been opposed to this idea of pre-emptive strikes, it was ignored by the Bush administration during the War on Terror. Contemporary teachings on the applicable legal rules record that "The Obama administration renounced the use of the phrase 'war on terror' (one cannot have a war with an abstract noun) but under successive administrations, the US has maintained a discrepant position on use of force, supported to a degree by the UK and some others. This is true not only with respect to anticipatory self-defence but also such issues as implied consent to the use of force and targeted killings".

To conclude, I tell my students, when considering these rules of international law, that they don't seem to apply evenly, when it comes to the US and Israel.

So, Is Cuba next? While the playbook for Venezuela – an oil blockade, the continued US military presence, federal charges, threats of intervention – appears to be on repeat in relation to Cuba, an Associated Press article quotes Brian Finucane, a senior adviser with the International Crisis Group and a former State Department lawyer as saying '…Cuba like Iran, is a very difficult country from Venezuela'.

The article cites anonymous Cuban officials as saying 'there is no Delcy in Cuba' and quotes William LeoGrande, a professor specializing in Latin American politics at American University in Washington thus: '…capturing [Raul] Castro…would not change the operations of the Cuban government'. In the opinion of Finacure, '[T]hey're very different situations…A snatch-and-grab raid against Raul Castro or someone who's actually in a leadership position doesn't seem like it's going to have the same outcome in Cuba as in Venezuela'.

For as long as these types of scenarios are being contemplated, the integrity of international law and the rules-based order is likely to be under strain and subjected to breaches and unilateral determinations of their applicability by the protagonists.

I thank you.

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The Algorithmic Commons: Deploying Ethical Artificial Intelligence to Reclaim Social Democracy in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana

Historical Trajectories of Social Democracy and the New Global Human Order

To understand how artificial intelligence can be adopted to promote social democracy in Guyana, one must trace the ideological lineage of the nation's governing apparatus. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was founded as the first mass-based, multi-ethnic political party in the country. Grounded in radical mobilisation of working-class sugar workers, the party sought to dismantle the exploitative economic structures inherited from British colonial rule.

Over decades of authoritarian governance under rigged electoral systems in the 1970s and 1980s, the political landscape became deeply fractured. The PPP, returning to power in 1992 through the country's first free and fair elections since independence, entered a phase of ideological recalibration. This culminated at the party's 32nd Congress on 5 May 2024, where delegates formally removed "Marxism-Leninism" and "socialism" from the party constitution, adopting social democracy as the official ideological platform while retaining democratic centralism.

This modern social democratic posture demands state-led interventions to balance capitalist growth with distributive equity, social justice, and sustainable human development. This synthesis is deeply aligned with the intellectual legacy of Dr Cheddi Jagan, whose political philosophy merged anti-colonial nationalism with democratic socialism, as detailed in his autobiographical work ***The West on Trial***. At the international scale, Jagan's vision for a New Global Human Order (NGHO) argued that global resources are structurally misallocated. The NGHO demanded global institutional reforms, including the empowerment of the United Nations in economic management, the redirection of Official Development Assistance so that two-thirds of aid flows directly to the poorest nations, the reallocation of military expenditures toward debt relief, and the implementation of a 0.5 percent Tobin Tax on speculative currency transfers to fund international social safety nets.

Applying the context of artificial intelligence's pervasiveness narrowly, we must consider that excessive inequality severely undermines economic growth and social cohesion. The rapid

acceleration of artificial intelligence represents the modern frontier of technological development. If left unregulated, it risks becoming a mechanism for further global wealth concentration and digital exclusion. A social democratic adoption of technology in Guyana must align with Jagan's vision: harnessing advanced computing power not as a tool of capital extraction, but as a public utility to reduce inequality and empower vulnerable populations.

Postcolonial Theory, Technological Dependency, and the Menace of Digital Colonialism

The adoption of artificial intelligence within Guyana cannot be treated as a politically neutral, technocratic upgrade. Postcolonial theory and dependency models offer critical lenses for understanding the structural risks inherent in this technological shift. Dr Walter Rodney demonstrated in his classic text ***How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*** and his collected writings in ***Decolonial Marxism*** that imperialism is a continuous process of structural underdevelopment. Rodney's decolonial framework emphasises that formal independence from colonial powers does not automatically guarantee actual emancipation. When postcolonial elites adopt metropolitan developmental models and technologies without contextual adaptation, they risk reinforcing asymmetric relations of economic and intellectual dependency. In the digital era, this structural asymmetry manifests as digital or data colonialism, characterised by the systematic appropriation of personal, social, and communal data from the Global South by multinational corporations and states in the Global North,

replicating the resource extraction dynamics of the colonial past. Historically, Guyana's raw materials, such as sugar, bauxite, and gold, were extracted to enrich the metropole, leaving the domestic economy dependent and vulnerable.

Under a data colonial paradigm, the new raw material is the behavioural and biophysical data harvested from the Guyanese citizenry. This data is processed in the Global North to train proprietary machine learning models, which are then sold back to the Global South as black-box solutions. This process concentrates wealth among a global tech elite while leaving postcolonial states in a position of technological dependency, unable to audit or control the systems that govern their public life. This exploitative relationship is supported by the twin dynamics of necroexportation and necrostratification. While the Global North enjoys the productivity gains and wealth accumulation from advanced computing, the ecological and human costs of digital infrastructure are exported to the Global South. This includes the extraction of mineral resources under hazardous conditions, the ecological impact of energy-intensive data centres on vulnerable ecosystems, and the precaritisation of digital labourers in developing countries who perform low-wage, unstable data-labelling and content moderation tasks.

Political, Philosophical, and Sociological Foundations of Ethical AI

To construct an ethical, social democratic framework for digital technology in Guyana, the state's policies must be grounded in established political, philosophical, and sociological theories. John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness offers a strong framework for digital policy, particularly through his difference principle which argues that social and economic inequalities are permissible only if they work to the maximum benefit of the least-advantaged members of society. In a social democracy, technological systems must not be used to concentrate wealth or automate public services in a way that excludes vulnerable groups. Instead, algorithms should be designed to prioritise resource distribution and public services to marginalised communities, such as bridging the digital divide between connected coastal areas and geographically isolated Amerindian communities in the hinterlands. Under a Rawlsian approach, public-sector algorithms can be mathematically modelled to prioritise equity. For example, the optimisation of public resource distribution can be structured to maximise utility while penalising systemic inequality across geographic or socio-demographic groups.

Beyond, Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action warns against the risk of technocratic systems replacing open, democratic debate. Habermas argues that a healthy democracy relies on communicative rationality, where public policy is shaped through transparent, uncoerced discussion in the public sphere. Decisions are automated at speeds and complexities that defy human comprehension, replacing democratic oversight with opaque mathematical models.

Finally, Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony and Louis Althusser's formulation of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) explain how ruling classes maintain control by establishing their worldviews as the dominant common sense of society. In the digital age, proprietary algorithms, search engines, and social media platforms function as digital ISAs. They shape how information is accessed, curate public discourse, and reinforce unequal global power relations. If Guyana adopts foreign-trained models without adjusting them for local socio-cultural realities, it risks importing a digital hegemony that reflects the biases, values, and market-driven assumptions of the Global North. To counter this, an ethical, social democratic approach must decolonise these digital structures, supporting open-source software, localised data architectures, and participatory design processes that reflect the multi-ethnic and co-operative aspirations of the Guyanese people.

Legislative Architectures, Data Sovereignty, and the Biometric Frontier

As Guyana builds its digital economy, it faces a complex debate over regulatory frameworks, data privacy, and democratic oversight, centring on the tension between rapid state-led modernisation and the protection of civil liberties. The legal structure of Guyana's digital economy relies on several key acts, including the Data Protection Act 2023 which regulates the processing, collection, and storage of personal information and is heavily modelled on the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). This is supported by the Digital Identity Card Act 2023, providing the legal framework for the national electronic identification (e-ID) system, the Open Data Act 2024 which regulates the publication and reuse of public-sector data, including the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act 2023 granting legal recognition to digital records, and the Cybercrime Act 2018 that criminalises unauthorised access and digital harassment.

In shaping its regulatory environment, Guyana faces a choice between aligning strictly with the EU's GDPR or adopting the Commonwealth Model Provisions (CMP) on Data Protection. Firstly, the CMP extends protection to legal persons, simplifying the regulatory environment for small

and medium-sized enterprises by reducing administrative barriers and protecting them from information asymmetry. Secondly, the CMP includes an unjustified detriment clause that assesses whether data processing causes unjustified harm to the fundamental rights or collective interests of vulnerable groups, highly valuable for Guyana's multi-ethnic society as a legal tool to challenge algorithmic systems that perpetuate structural discrimination or spatial inequalities. Finally, rather than the strict 72-hour notification window of the GDPR which can overwhelm under-resourced regulators, the CMP mandates notification within a timely manner, allowing small states to conduct thorough investigations before reporting.

Structural Recommendations for a Social Democratic AI Framework

To resolve the tensions of its rapid digital modernisation and align its technological transition with social democratic values, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana must pursue deliberate and protective legislative policies.

It must implement strict Right to Explanation standards, ensuring that any citizen affected by an automated decision has access to a clear, non-technical explanation of the system's logic, while banning the use of black-box models in high-stakes public sectors unless the code and training datasets are open for independent regulatory auditing.

Additionally, Guyana should leverage its macroeconomic growth to assert digital sovereignty and build national cloud infrastructure. This involves establishing state-owned, green data centres powered by solar microgrids to host the e-ID registry, educational platforms, and public-sector databases locally, thereby reducing dependency on foreign corporations. The state must mandate strict data localisation policies for sensitive public-sector and biophysical data, preventing its export and processing in foreign jurisdictions without explicit, democratic consent. Simultaneously, the state should promote open-source software stacks for e-government services, reducing licensing costs and allowing local developers to modify systems to fit the country's specific linguistic and cultural context.

Finally, to align its technological expansion with Rawlsian justice and the human development goals of the New Global Human Order, the state must deepen digital inclusion and expand the collective commons. This entails reinvesting national revenues to expand solar-powered ICT hubs in hinterland and remote communities, ensuring high-speed internet access for all Amerindian villages. Guyana must continue to integrate the One Guyana Digital and Guyana Coders Initiative into advanced technical and vocational programmes, turning local ICT hubs into centres for software design, robotics, and data science. Lastly, the state should incorporate the unjustified detriment principle from the Commonwealth Model Provisions into the national data protection framework, allowing communities to seek legal recourse if algorithmic systems result in spatial or social discrimination, ensuring that technological progress serves as a tool for national empowerment, social justice, and true human development.

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Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism is the imposition of a dominant society's values, language and practices into another society. This is done through a number of ways but more commonly through mass media and the structural imbalances in the global economy. One consequence of this development is the erosion of local traditions.

Sociologists have long argued that such erosion of national cultures and identities can have negative consequences for the less developed societies. For one thing, it can result in an erosion of diversity leading to a loss of unique folklore, language and generational heritage.

Cultural erosion take several forms. It is the gradual loss of a society cultural norms and values invariably by a stronger and dominant group. Guyana's cultural values for example were influenced by its former colonial status. The traditional costumes of the Indian and African subject populations gave way gradually to European costumes such as the suit and tie, despite the scorching tropical heat. The same could be said fo food, language and religion.

It was the German philosopher and revolutionary who famously wrote that 'the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. The same can be juxtaposed to culture wherein the culture of the dominant society are the dominant culture.

Our own experience in Guyana has been instructive. To a large extent our cultural make-up is shaped by a colonial mindset in which we value foreign items more than we do our own. How else can we explain our continuing dependence on imported items when we can have healthier and more nutritious products right here in Guyana?

But it is in the field of ideas that our cultural dependence is all the more dependent. Developing countries get most of their information on international issues from from international media outlets such as BBC, CNN, Aljazeera, Fox News and Russian TV all of which are biased in their coverage of the news according to who owns and control the media. This is very much apparent in the coverage of major international news such as the Ukraine war, the war in Gaza and the Iranian war.

The saying that news media are in essence views media is very much in media. It takes a discerning mind to sift through the complex layers of truths, half-truths and outright misinformation to navigate the complexity of the media landscape.

To a large extent, the media landscape is changing. People are no longer depending as in the past for information on the mainstream media. Social media is now becoming a significant if not preferred mode of communication with platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Tic Toc becoming increasingly popular.

One important consequence of these developments is that individuals are no longer passive consumers of news but are in their owns ways shaping and influencing the news contents in ways not hitherto possible. What we are experiencing are raw and unfiltered information some of which borders on misinformation to outright lewdness. In a way the introduction of social media has literally given everyone with internet access a voice. In a way, the media landscape is becoming more 'democratized' even though in an uncontrolled and in some cases bizarre manner.

There is also the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) which can bring tons of information on any given subject at the click of a button. This new technological mode has gone way beyond mere information gathering and has now taken on roles and functions that can substitute for manual, mental, intellectual and mental labour. This new algorithm is even used to provide for emotional gratification which can have implications for human interactions and emotional bonding.

In Guyana's case, the media landscape is changing gradually in the direction of social media platforms. The popular Stabroek News which until recently dominated the print media landscape has now ceased operations and is replaced by 'Kiskadee Watch' an online news media with similar objectives, namely to provide news that are purportedly objective, independent and free from governmental control.

Kaieteur News operated along similar lines although it comes across more as an anti-establishment forum with news that operated on the 'man bite dog' media philosophy. In other words, there are lots of sensationalism and government bashing and little on the developmental agenda of the government.

This raises the question of what exactly the role of the media in

terms of the provision of fair, objective and balanced news. It is quite obvious that with the exception of the Guyana Chronicle, the Guyana Times and the National Communications Network (NCN) the other news outlets, both print and electronic seemingly have an anti-governmental slant. Very little is reported on the massive developmental agenda of the ruling PPP/C administration and the massive transformation and modernization currently underway.

The concept of development support communication has for all practical purposes gone overboard as far as the so-called independent media is concerned. Very little is reported on the massive infrastructural developments taking place in the country and other sectoral developments such as housing, water, improved access to education and health services to name but a few.

But the concept of cultural imperialism is much more pervasive. The media, especially from the advanced countries such as Canada, United States and Britain also influence consumer tastes and can also raise consumer expectations beyond their ability to satisfy. This is especially so in the case of consumer durables such as fashion clothing and motor vehicles. In the mad rush to keep up with the Jones' consumers found themselves taking out inordinate and unsustainable credits only to find that they are trapped in a vicious debt trap.

The concept of cultural imperialism is not limited to the gravitational pull of western media on peripheral states. Sociologists speak to the issue of cultural lag to describe a situation where traditional societies gradually loose their identity because of the impact of technological advances on their traditional mode of life.

Guyana has managed to a fair extent to retain some aspects of its traditional cultural heritage. For example, there is the Mashramani festival which is a fusion of the cultural expressions of all ethnic groups in Guyana by way of music, dance and costume. Guyanese celebrate the festivals of all the main religious communities such as Christmas, Easter, Phagwah and Eid-ul-fitir. Indeed, it is true to say that Guyana has now become a truly multicultural society in which there is religious and cultural tolerance.

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INPUT BY SAFTU GENERAL SECRETARY ZWELINZIMA VAVI AT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION SEMINAR

June 29, 2026
Hosted By the African Renaissance Podcast & Dr. Mbuyiseni Ndlozi

THIRTY-TWO YEARS OF DEMOCRACY: A WORKING-CLASS ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Comrades, colleagues, leaders of the movement, intellectuals, veterans of the struggle, and fellow South Africans, I must begin by locating myself. I am not speaking here as a neutral observer. I am not speaking as an academic standing outside the battle. I speak as a trade unionist. I speak from the standpoint of the organised working class. I speak from the accumulated experience of almost four decades in the leadership of the South African trade union movement: from COSATU (Congress of South Africa Trade Unions) locals, to regional leadership, to national organiser, to Deputy General Secretary, to fifteen years as General Secretary of COSATU, and now as General Secretary of SAFTU (South Africa Federation of Trade Unions).

That experience has placed me inside almost every major debate of democratic South Africa.

- The RDP (Reconstructive and Development Programme)
- GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution)

- Privatisation
- Labour-market restructuring.
- Industrial policy.
- Austerity.
- State capture.
- The crisis of the Alliance.
- The birth of SAFTU.
- The weakening of the working class.

I therefore speak not as someone looking back from the comfort of hindsight. I speak as someone who was there when these battles were fought and I want to state the central argument plainly.

The working class was correct to warn that abandoning the transformative spirit of the Freedom Charter, Morogoro (In a city and region in Tanzania and served as the primary headquarters of the ANC while exiled and banned in South Africa), and the RDP would bring South Africa to the precipice where we now stand.

I do not say that in triumph. There is nothing to celebrate when workers are vindicated by mass unemployment, hunger, and despair.

But history must be honest.

Workers warned against neoliberalism. Workers warned against GEAR. Workers warned against privatisation. Workers warned against labour broking. Workers warned against premature trade liberalisation. Workers warned against austerity. Workers warned against commercialising public goods. Workers warned that a democracy that does not transform the material conditions of the majority would one day face a crisis of legitimacy. Today, thirty-two years after democracy, those warnings can no longer be dismissed as slogans. They must be confronted as history.

The dream of liberation: The National Democratic Revolution was never meant to be merely about changing who occupies the Union Buildings. Workers did not fight simply to change the colour of those who govern. Workers fought to change the conditions under which they live. The Freedom Charter was not an academic text. It was a covenant with the oppressed. It promised that the people shall govern. That the people shall share in the country's wealth. That the land shall be shared among those who work it. That there shall be work and security. That there shall be houses, security, and comfort. That the doors of learning and culture shall be opened. That there shall be equal justice.

The ANC Strategy and Tactics adopted at Morogoro sharpened this further. It warned that in South Africa, more than in most oppressed countries, liberation would be meaningless unless the wealth of the land returned to the people as a whole. It warned that allowing existing economic interests to retain their power intact would not even represent the shadow of liberation. That was not ultra-left rhetoric. That was the ANC at Morogoro.

That was the liberation movement, understanding that political power without economic transformation would betray the deeper meaning of freedom. The RDP then became the bridge between dream and government. It was the Freedom Charter translated into a programme. Housing, Water, Electricity, Jobs, Land, Industrial development, Education, Healthcare, Public transport, Regional development and Democratic participation.

The tragedy is that the RDP has disappeared from our political vocabulary. Instead of reconstruction, we speak of fiscal consolidation. Instead of redistribution, we speak of investor confidence.

Instead of public goods, we speak of cost recovery. Instead of solidarity, we speak of markets.

That ideological shift matters. It is at the heart of the crisis.

What has democracy achieved? Let us be fair. Democracy changed South Africa. Apartheid was defeated. Universal suffrage was won. A progressive Constitution was adopted. Workers' rights were entrenched. The apartheid labour market was transformed through the Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Employment Equity Act, the Skills Development framework, and other laws. Millions gained access to housing. Millions gained access to electricity. Millions gained water. Millions receive social grants. These gains are real. They were not gifts. They were victories won through struggle. They must be defended.

But we must also tell the truth. Access without affordability is not liberation completed. A house without work nearby condemns workers to long and expensive travel. Electricity that exists but cannot be afforded does not fulfil the Freedom Charter. Water that is connected but priced beyond the poor does not represent dignity. Public transport that collapses forces workers into expensive alternatives. A Constitution

that promises rights cannot satisfy a hungry child. So yes, democracy delivered important advances. But from the standpoint of the working class, it failed to complete the transformation that gave those advances their meaning.

The working-class verdict

Thirty-two years later, South Africa is on a precipice. Not because nothing changed.

That would be false, but because the structures that reproduce poverty, unemployment, and inequality remain fundamentally intact. More than thirteen million South Africans are unemployed by the expanded definition.

This is not a statistic:

It is a national catastrophe.

It means young people waking up every morning with nowhere to go.

It means graduates sending CVs into silence.

It means parents are unable to feed their children.

It means pensioners supporting entire households.

It means workers accepting any wage because unemployment has become a weapon.

It means unions are weakened because millions are outside stable employment.

It means despair.

The greatest betrayal of democratic South Africa has been the normalisation of mass unemployment.

We speak about unemployment as if it were weather. As if it simply happened. It did not simply happen. It is the result of choices. Choices to abandon a decisive industrial strategy. Choices to liberalise prematurely. Choices to allow deindustrialisation. Choices to tolerate labour broking and casualisation. Choices to discipline public expenditure instead of mobilising the state to create work.

The Freedom Charter promised work and security. Millions have neither. Hunger in a land of plenty;

Perhaps nothing exposes the failure of the National Democratic Revolution more painfully than hunger. South Africa is a country capable of feeding its people. Yet millions experience food insecurity, Millions skip meals, Children suffer from malnutrition and stunting, Workers increasingly cannot afford nutritious food even when they are employed.

Here, we must be careful with statistics because different institutions measure different things.

Stats SA measures poverty and household food access in one way. SALDRU (Southern Africa Labor and Development Research Unit) and academic researchers often measure poverty and deprivation differently. The Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group measures the cost of a basic and nutritious food basket. Oxford's multidimensional poverty approach looks beyond income to broader deprivation.

These are not contradictions:

They are different windows into the same crisis.

The working-class experience of poverty is not a methodology.

It is the question: Can I feed my child tonight?

Workers did not struggle for political freedom to queue for food parcels.

They did not fight apartheid so that children could arrive at school hungry.

Hunger is not charity work.

Hunger is a political economy.

It is about wages, Jobs, Land, Food prices. Transport costs, Social grants, Corporate concentration in the food system, Climate change and the failure to use the democratic state decisively to ensure that no child goes to bed hungry.

The land, housing, and apartheid geography; The land question remains unfinished, But we must not reduce land only to commercial agriculture and is also an urban question. Millions have moved from rural areas, former Bantustans, and apartheid labour reserves into cities searching for work.

They arrive in cities built by apartheid to exclude them. They settle in informal settlements because land and housing are unavailable or unaffordable. They live far from jobs. They spend hours and large portions of their income travelling. They remain trapped in apartheid geography.

So, when the Freedom Charter says the land shall be shared among those who work it, we must hear that as a rural and urban demand:

It is about farms.

But it is also about cities.

It is about housing.

It is about transport.

It is about spatial justice.

It is about whether workers can live near opportunity.

Public transport is a class question

For decades, the organised trade union movement has argued that public transport is not a luxury. It is a working-class necessity. From COSATU to SAFTU, we have demanded a publicly accountable, reliable, safe, integrated, and affordable public transport system. The collapse of commuter rail was one of the greatest attacks on workers' living standards. In Gauteng and the Western Cape, millions who depended on trains were forced into more expensive transport. Every extra rand spent on transport is a rand taken from food, school needs, electricity, or healthcare. Every extra hour on the road is an hour stolen from family life, rest, and community participation. The rebuilding of the rail must be welcomed. But we must be clear: public transport cannot be left to the logic of profit.

It is a public good.

The state and justice the working class also experiences the state through policing, courts, Home Affairs, municipalities, clinics, schools, labour centres, and public transport. That is why the state of the state matters. A weak state hurts the poor first. The rich can buy alternatives. They can buy private security. Private healthcare. Private education. Private transport. Senior counsel. Forensic accountants. Delaying tactics. The poor cannot.

When the police fail, the poor suffer. When detectives are weak, the poor suffer. When prosecution collapses, the poor suffer. When courts are delayed, the poor suffer. When Legal Aid is overstretched, the poor suffer. Justice has increasingly become stratified by class. The rich can litigate for years. The poor are told to wait. The Freedom Charter promised equal justice.

But equal justice requires more than beautiful constitutional language. It requires a functioning criminal justice system. It requires detection. Investigation. Forensics. Prosecution. Conviction. Protection of women and children. Protection of workers in townships and informal settlements. Crime is not only a security issue. It is a class issue.

The global balance of forces and our choices

We must also be historically honest. The democratic breakthrough happened at a terrible moment in world history. When the Freedom Charter was adopted, when the SACP (South Africa Communist Party) drafted The Road to South African Freedom, when Morogoro met, the world still had a socialist bloc. There was a contest between systems. Capital was not as arrogant as it later became. By 1994, the Soviet Union had collapsed. Eastern Europe had collapsed. The world entered a unipolar moment. Thatcher and Reagan had already helped unleash neoliberal globalisation. Capital became mobile. States competed to attract investment. Trade unions weakened globally. Inequality rose.

The share of income going to workers came under pressure.

Privatisation, deregulation, outsourcing, and austerity became the language of the age.

South Africa entered democracy at the high tide of neoliberalism. That is an objective fact.

But comrades, objective conditions do not abolish political choice. Liberation movements are not judged only by the constraints they inherit. They are judged by the choices they make within those constraints. And here the working class must be clear. GEAR represented a decisive rupture with the RDP. It shifted the centre of gravity from reconstruction and redistribution to fiscal discipline, liberalisation, and market confidence.

The trade union movement warned that this would not

deliver the promised jobs. We warned it would weaken industrialisation. We warned it would deepen inequality. We warned it would strengthen capital at the expense of labour. Thirty years later, history requires an honest reckoning. The issue is not to shout, "we told you so." The issue is to ask why the warnings from workers were ignored.

The 2008 global financial crisis gave the world a lesson. It was the worst capitalist crisis since the Great Depression. Capitalism itself was rescued by the state. The United States, where the crisis began, abandoned free-market dogma when its own system was threatened. It used massive monetary intervention. It used a stimulus. It used public power to stabilise the economy.

Much of Western Europe chose austerity. South Africa followed too closely the austerity path.

Instead of using the crisis to launch a bold programme of reindustrialisation, infrastructure expansion, public employment and redistribution, we moved increasingly towards fiscal consolidation. The VAT increase to 15% became a symbol of that choice. The burden fell on workers and the poor. The result was weak growth. Weak investment. Deepening unemployment. Falling confidence.

A state increasingly unable to meet the demands of society. The organised labour movement argued for a different route. We argued for state-led development, Industrial policy, infrastructure, Redistribution, Employment creation, Support for domestic production, A stronger public sector, We were not listened to today, the evidence is written in the lives of workers.

The recomposition of the working class but we must also look at ourselves. The working class of today is not the same working class that defeated apartheid. Factories have closed, Mines have shed jobs, Permanent work has declined, Labour broking, outsourcing, casualisation, and platform work have grown, Remote work has changed the workplace, Workers are more fragmented and They are harder to organise.

Millions are unemployed and have never experienced union culture, political education, or workplace democracy. This is fundamental. The motive force of the National Democratic Revolution has been restructured. Trade unions cannot simply organise as if we are still in the 1980s. The working class now includes permanent workers, precarious workers, informal workers, platform workers, unemployed workers, domestic workers, farm workers, community health workers, young graduates without work, and pensioners supporting households. If unions organise only those in permanent employment, they will become representatives of a shrinking minority of the class. The future of trade unionism depends on organising the whole working class.

The weakening of solidarity

Material crisis produces political consequences.

When people lose hope, they search for explanations.

If progressive organisations are weak, reactionaries provide answers.

That is why we see:

- xenophobia.
- Afrophobia.
- Ethnic chauvinism.
- Regionalism.
- Racism.
- Sexism.
- Personality cults.

The liberation movement once united people across tribe, language, and race.

Workers entered factories as Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Tsonga, Coloured, Indian, and white workers. They emerged as comrades. That unity did not fall from heaven. It was built through organisation and political education. Today, those institutions have weakened; The ANC has weakened, Unions have weakened, Civics have weakened, Youth formations have weakened.

Political education has weakened. In that vacuum, old backward identities return. We see people chanting against "Shangaans."

We see ethnic voting patterns hardening. We see migrants blamed for unemployment they did not create. Our fallen heroes must be turning in their graves, They did not die for tribalism, They did not die for xenophobia, They did not die for Afrophobia and They did not die so that the poor can attack the poorer while capital escapes untouched.

Psychological liberation

This is where Fanon and Biko remain indispensable. Fanon warned that colonialism does not only occupy land. It occupies the mind. Biko warned that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Political liberation did not automatically complete psychological liberation. The collapse of Black solidarity is one of the most painful signs of this unfinished task. When Black suffering becomes normal to us, something has gone terribly wrong.

When we are unmoved by the suffering of Black children at traffic lights, but moved immediately when whiteness cries on television, Fanon is speaking to us. When Africans turn against other Africans, colonialism is still alive in the mind. When the oppressed police one another instead of confronting the system that oppresses them, the revolution remains incomplete.

The moral crisis:

We must also speak about values. The liberation movement once celebrated sacrifice, Modesty.

Service, Collective leadership, Ubuntu, Today, too often we see crass materialism.

Opulence, The abuse of office, Politics as a route to accumulation, Union positions were fought over because of investment companies, travel claims, and access to resources, Leadership contests shaped by money rather than political grounding and the class composition of leadership has changed. Many leaders no longer live where workers live. They no longer use the services workers use. Their children do not attend the schools that workers use. Their daily life is no longer the life of the class they claim to represent.

Social location shapes consciousness.

A leadership that lives far from workers can begin to speak left while living right.

That is one of the dangers confronting liberation movements and trade unions alike.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us with one conclusion. The National Democratic Revolution must be renewed,or it will become a historical slogan. Renewal cannot mean nostalgia.

It cannot mean repeating old phrases. It must mean returning to the core promise of liberation, Work, Land, Food, Housing, Public transport, Public services, Equality, Justice, Solidarity and Socialism.

A renewed NDR must rebuild the developmental state.

- It must abandon austerity.
- It must reindustrialise.
- It must tax wealth.
- It must stop illicit financial flows.
- It must discipline capital.
- It must rebuild public transport.
- It must treat water, electricity, health, education, and transport as public goods.
- It must confront hunger as a national emergency.
- It must rebuild political education.
- It must organise the unemployed and precarious workers.
- It must defend migrants while demanding lawful and humane migration management.
- It must pursue regional integration because no wall can defeat poverty.
- It must rebuild the moral authority of leadership.
- It must restore the working class as the leading force of transformation.

Comrades, the Freedom Charter was our dream during the nightmare of apartheid. The RDP was the first attempt to turn that dream into government. But during the dream of democracy, millions of workers and poor people have lived a new nightmare of unemployment, hunger, inequality, unaffordable services, crime, and despair. That is the contradiction we must confront. This paper is not an apology for failure it is not a rejection of the democratic breakthrough.

It is a working-class call for honesty. Democracy gave us political freedom. But political freedom without economic justice remains unfinished. The generation that defeated apartheid fulfilled its mission. Our generation must complete the unfinished tasks of liberation.

And that means saying clearly:

- The working class was not wrong to demand a different path.
- We were not wrong to defend the RDP.
- We were not wrong to oppose GEAR.
- We were not wrong to oppose privatisation.
- We were not wrong to oppose labour broking.
- We were not wrong to oppose austerity.
- We were not wrong to insist that the wealth of this country must serve the people as a whole.

The task now is not to mourn what was lost the task is to rebuild. to organise, to educate, to unite and to fight. And to ensure that the promise of the Freedom Charter becomes not a memory of what we once dreamed, but the lived reality of every worker, every child, every community, and every person who calls South Africa home.

I thank you.

IMRAN KHAN, FROM CRICKET LEGEND, TO PHILANTROPHIST, TO PRIME MINISTER TO POLITICAL PRISONER

IMRAN AHMED KHAN NIAZI was born on 5th. October 1952 in Lahore, Pakistan into a prosperous Pashtun household, His father was a Civil Engineer, and his mother was from a well-respected after which he proceeded to family, known for education and public service. Young Imran attended the prestigious Aitchison College, after which he went to England to continue his academic studies, first at the Royal Grammar School in Worcester, and then at the University of Oxford, where he pursued studies in philosophy, Politics and Economics, graduating in 1975.

While studying in England, Imran developed into one of Pakistan's and indeed one of the world's greatest cricketers. He was tall, athletic and charismatic and excelled as a fast bowler and all-rounder, which included both batting and fielding. He started his international cricketing career before attaining the age of twenty and perfected his skills to the extent that he would become one of the world's greatest cricket captains.

His greatest achievement in cricket was in 1992 when he captained Pakistan to its first cricket world cup victory, despite fighting injuries and nearing the age cricketers normally retire. To date that was Pakistan's only world cup win. His obvious leadership skills and determination to win were clearly proven. The world cup victory was responsible for Imran becoming a national hero in Pakistan and much respected in the wider cricketing fraternity.

During his cricketing journey, Imran played eighty-eight test matches and one hundred and seventy-five one day internationals (ODI's, 50 overs per team) for Pakistan and secured the coveted honor of being one of the worlds and certainly Pakistan's greatest all-rounder. He scored 3,807runs and took 362 wickets in tests and 3,709 runs in ODI's and 182 wickets in ODI's. In the interest of space, other impressive records, but cannot fail to mention that in 2009 Imran Khan was inducted into the ICC Cricket Hall of Fame.

Having established his prowess and respect as a cricketer, we can move on to another aspect of Imran Khan's life. His mother's death from cancer so affected his campaign abdicated and devoted much of his time and energy to philanthropy, which motivated him to establish the Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital in Lahore, which was constructed through

a nationwide fundraising campaign, and has become the first modern charitable cancer hospital to offer treatment to anyone, regardless of the ability to pay. He then devoted his efforts to establish the Namal University to expand educational opportunities for rural Pakistanis. These charitable achievements significantly enhanced Imran Khan's reputation as a reliable, trusted and honest person who was prepared to devote his fame and wealth in the interest of service to the people, rather than personal enrichment.

In 1996, Imran entered the political arena by founding the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, translated to English as Pakistan Movement for Justice (PTI). He touted his PTI as the alternative to the two parties which dominated Pakistan politics for decades, led by the Bhutto and Sharif families. The PTI was put to the Pakistan people as the alternative to ending corruption, strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring justice for all.

For many years, the party failed to make inroads into the political establishment, often having nearly empty venues and being dismissed as a celebrity, full of idealism and little understanding of politics. In 1997, the PTI failed to obtain a single seat in the Parliamentary elections.

His repeated failures did not deter him, and he continued to criticize the military dictatorship, rampant corruption, foreign interference and dynastic politics. His fiery presentations started to resonate with the expanding urban middle class and younger voters, who were frustrated by chronic, persistent economic problems and blatant and widespread corruption in government.

By 2010 the PTI had started to attract hundreds of thousands of supporters across Pakistan, who joined in the movement to create what he described as "Naya Pakistan" or "New Pakistan" which was based on accountability, transparency, economic reforms and Islamic welfare principles.

In 2013, PTI emerged as a signify national movement, and even though it did not win the elections, it formed the government on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and had now become the third largest political party. He and his party alleged massive electoral fraud and were engaged in continuous demonstrations, demanding electoral reforms. His opponents counter accused him of alleged corruption and abuse of his office.

Five years after he was recognized as a political leader to be reckoned with, his party won the largest number of seats in Parliamentary elections, formed a coalition government and the former cricketer became Pakistan's twenty second Prime Minister, just after two decades of dogged persistence, enduring struggle against the country's entrenched political establishment and hard work.

As Prime Minister, Khan sought to reform Pakistan's economy, improve tax collection, expand social welfare, combat corruption, and strengthen Pakistan's international standing. His government introduced several welfare initiatives, including expanded health insurance and poverty alleviation programs. It also attempted to stabilize an economy burdened by debt and inflation.

However, Khan's administration faced formidable challenges. Pakistan continued to struggle with rising inflation, unemployment, and balance-of-payments difficulties. His government relied on financial assistance from international institutions while attempting to implement difficult economic reforms. Political opponents accused his administration of poor governance, while supporters argued that he inherited severe structural problems from previous governments.

Foreign policy also presented significant challenges. Khan maintained close relations with China while attempting to balance Pakistan's complex relationships with the United States, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and neighbouring India. His government attracted international attention during the American withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, an event that profoundly reshaped regional security dynamic.

Perhaps the defining feature of Khan's premiership was his evolving relationship with Pakistan's powerful military establishment. Initially, many observers believed his government enjoyed military support. Over time, however, reports emerged of growing disagreements over appointments, governance, and strategic policy. By late 2021, tensions between Khan and senior military leaders had become increasingly apparent.

These disagreements would ultimately contribute to one of the most dramatic political crises in Pakistan's modern history. In April 2022, following months of political manoeuvring, Khan lost a parliamentary vote of no confidence and became the first Pakistani Prime Minister to be removed through that constitutional mechanism. He alleged that his removal resulted from a conspiracy involving domestic political opponents and powerful institutions, allegations that his opponents rejected and denied.

Rather than withdrawing from politics, Khan launched an unprecedented nationwide campaign demanding fresh elections. Massive public rallies demonstrates that his popularity

remained extraordinarily high despite his removal from office. The stage was now set for an escalating confrontation between Khan, Pakistan's political establishment, and the country's judicial institutions - a confrontation that would eventually culminate in his arrest, prolonged detention, and one of the most consequential political imprisonments in Pakistan's history.

He remains in prison since 2023, and this has become one of the definitive political issues in Pakistan raising issues about democracy, judicial independence, military influence, and the rule of law.

Imran Khan's removal from office in April 2022 marked one of the most significant turning points in Pakistan's political history. After losing the support of several coalition partners and facing growing tensions with Pakistan's military establishment, Khan became the first Prime Minister in the country's history to be removed through a parliamentary vote of no confidence. Although the process followed constitutional procedures, Khan strongly rejected its legitimacy, alleging that it was the result of a conspiracy involving domestic political rivals and foreign interests, particularly the United States. Washington denied these allegations, as did Pakistan's coalition government.

Following his removal, Khan refused to retire from politics. Instead, he launched an energetic nationwide campaign demanding immediate general elections. Addressing massive public rallies across Pakistan, he accused the new coalition government of corruption and claimed that powerful institutions were attempting to prevent genuine democratic change. His speeches attracted enormous crowds, especially among young Pakistanis, who viewed him as an honest leader confronting an entrenched political elite.

Throughout late 2022 and early 2023, political tensions intensified. Khan survived an assassination attempt during a political rally in Wazirabad in November 2022, when he was shot in the leg while greeting supporters from a campaign vehicle. One person was killed and several others injured. Khan blamed senior government and intelligence officials for failing to protect him, allegations they denied.

Meanwhile, numerous legal cases were filed against him. Pakistani authorities accused Khan of corruption, misuse of state gifts, contempt of court, leaking classified information, terrorism-related offences connected to political protests, and unlawful marriage registration. His supporters argued that the sheer number of cases-well over one hundred-demonstrated an attempt to overwhelm him legally and exclude him from politics rather than pursue genuine accountability.

The first dramatic arrest occurred on 9 May 2023, when paramilitary forces detained Khan inside the Islamabad High Court. The arrest triggered nationwide protests unlike any Pakistan had witnessed in recent decades. Thousands of PTI supporters demonstrated throughout the country, and some protests turned violent. Military installations, government buildings, and public property were attacked in several cities. The government condemned the violence and arrested thousands of party workers, while PTI insisted that many demonstrators had been peaceful and accused security forces of using excessive force.

Pakistan's Supreme Court later ruled that Khan's arrest inside court premises had been unlawful, leading to his temporary release. However, his legal troubles continued. In August 2023, he was convicted in the Toshakhana case, which involved allegations that he improperly retained and sold state gifts received while serving as Prime Minister. Khan denied wrongdoing, arguing that previous leaders had followed similar practices and that the prosecution was politically motivated.

Although some convictions were later suspended or overturned on appeal, additional cases quickly followed. Among the most serious was the so-called "cipher case," in which prosecutors alleged that Khan had unlawfully disclosed classified diplomatic communications. Another major case involved allegations concerning his marriage to Bushra Bibi before the completion of her legally required waiting period ('iddat) after divorce. Both Khan and his wife rejected the accusations as politically inspired.

As legal proceedings multiplied, Khan remained imprisoned for much of the period after August 2023. Despite incarceration, he continued to exercise enormous influence over Pakistani politics. Through statements issued by his legal team and messages shared by PTI leaders, he urged supporters to remain committed to democratic struggle and peaceful political participation.

The 2024 general election demonstrated that Khan's popularity remained remarkably resilient. Although PTI candidates were forced to contest as independents after the party lost its electoral symbol due to legal rulings, candidates backed by Khan won the largest number of individual seats in the National Assembly. However, because they lacked formal party recognition and coalition partners, another coalition government was formed without PTI.

The election itself generated widespread controversy. Domestic observers, opposition parties, and several international organizations raised concerns regarding restrictions on campaigning, arrests of opposition figures, media limitations, and delays in announcing results. Government officials defended the conduct of the election, arguing that legal processes had been properly followed and that security concerns justified certain restrictions.

By this stage, Imran Khan had become both one of Pakistan's most popular political leaders and one of its most controversial prisoners. His supporters viewed him as the victim of an establishment determined to prevent democratic reform, while critics argued that he had failed to respect legal institutions and should answer corruption allegations like any other citizen. These competing narratives continue to shape Pakistan's deeply polarized political landscape.

Detention, International Reactions, and Legacy

Imran Khan's continued imprisonment has attracted significant international attention. Human rights organizations have expressed concern about due process, the large number of legal cases filed against him, restrictions on his political party, and the arrest of thousands of PTI supporters.

At the same time, they have also condemned violence committed during the May 2023 protests, emphasizing that accountability should apply to all individuals regardless of political affiliation.

Governments around the world have generally avoided taking explicit positions regarding Khan's guilt or innocence. Instead, many have emphasized the importance of fair trials, judicial independence, respect for democratic institutions, and peaceful political competition. Pakistan's government has consistently maintained that the judiciary operates independently and that Khan's cases concern alleged criminal offences rather than political persecution.

The role of Pakistan's military has remained central to discussions surrounding Khan's detention. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, the armed forces have exercised enormous influence over national politics, even during periods of civilian government. Many political analysts argue that successful civilian leaders have often depended upon at least tacit military support. Khan himself was widely believed to have benefited from such support before relations deteriorated during his final year in office.

Supporters contend that Khan's imprisonment reflects the unwillingness of powerful institutions to tolerate an independent civilian leader capable of mobilizing millions of ordinary Pakistanis.

They argue that legal proceedings have been selective and politically motivated, pointing to the unusually large number of cases brought against him within a relatively short period.

His critics present a different interpretation. They argue that Khan frequently challenged state institutions, encouraged confrontational politics, and bears responsibility for creating an atmosphere that contributed to violent protests. They further contend that allegations involving state gifts, classified information, and other legal matters deserve impartial judicial examination irrespective of his popularity.

Whatever interpretation one adopts, few observers dispute Khan's profound impact upon Pakistan's political culture. Before entering politics, electoral competition largely revolved around established political dynasties. Khan successfully transformed PTI into a mass movement attracting urban professionals, students, overseas Pakistanis, and younger voters who demanded greater accountability from government institutions.

His political message combined nationalism, anti-corruption reform, Islamic social welfare, and promises of economic modernization. Although critics questioned whether his government fulfilled these promises, many supporters believe he fundamentally changed public expectations regarding transparency and governance.

Khan's legacy is therefore complex. As a cricketer, he united Pakistan through sporting achievement and inspired generations of athletes. As a philanthropist, he established institutions that continue to provide healthcare and education to thousands of Pakistanis. As Prime Minister, he introduced social welfare initiatives and sought to reform government institutions while confronting serious economic and political challenges. As an opposition leader and detainee, he became the focal point of one of the country's deepest constitutional and political crises.

His imprisonment also raises broader questions extending beyond his personal circumstances. The controversy touches upon judicial independence, civilian-military relations, electoral fairness, freedom of expression, and the resilience of democratic institutions in Pakistan. These issues will continue to shape the country's future regardless of Khan's eventual legal outcome.

History often judges political leaders differently from their contemporaries. Some figures once condemned later become celebrated reformers, while others initially admired are remembered more critically. Imran Khan's ultimate place in Pakistan's history will likely depend upon future political developments, the final resolution of his legal cases, and the long-term impact of his reforms and political movement.

What is already beyond dispute is that Imran Khan has been one of the most influential personalities in Pakistan's modern history. His journey from Oxford student to international cricket champion, philanthropist, Prime Minister, opposition leader, and detainee reflects the opportunities and contradictions of Pakistani politics itself. Whether regarded as a visionary reformer, a flawed populist, or something between these extremes, his life has left an enduring mark on his nation.

As Pakistan continues to navigate political uncertainty, economic challenges, and institutional tensions, the story of Imran Khan remains unfinished. Future historians will undoubtedly debate the causes of his rise, the reasons for his downfall, and the significance of his detention. What is certain is that his life will remain an essential chapter in understanding the political evolution of Pakistan during the twenty-first century.

The above article was presented by a guest contributor, who confirmed that parts of it were extracted from various sources on the life of Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi.

Harry Narine Nawbatt is a former High Commissioner to Canada and former Minister of Housing and Water. Mr Nawbatt was associated with SIMAP.

The West on Trial

Chapter IV
Getting into Stride

Editor's Note:
As an added feature the Thinker would be Introducing Cheddi Jagan's Fight for Guyana's Freedom as documented in The West on Trial, chapter by chapter, in future issues.

The employers have invested their money in industry, but the workers have invested their lives in it.

Robert Smillie

"What part of India do you come from?" That is how the question was very often put to me during my student days in the United States. "I'm from British Guiana." Inevitably, the next question was: "What part of Africa is that?" Somehow, British Guiana was confused with Guinea in Africa. Many people with whom I came in contact were more often than not quite surprised to know that my country was part of the South American mainland.

British Guiana, situated on the northeast shoulder of South America, is sandwiched between Surinam on the east and Venezuela on the west. On the southern side is Brazil and on the northern side the Atlantic Ocean. The coast faces roughly northeast and is about 270 miles long from the Corentyne River on the east to the Waini River on the west.

The Dutch had established their plantations along the banks of the great rivers, the Essequibo, Demerara, Berbice and Corentyne. This had been done partly because the rivers made it easy for the Dutch to get into contact with the Amerindians, with whom they exchanged manufactured articles of trifling value for annato, balsam, copaiba and other commodities, and partly for reasons of defense and security. An added reason was that the riverain lands had easy natural drainage and were not liable to inundation by water from the sea. But from the middle of the 18th century, perhaps because of land exhaustion, these areas were deserted and agriculture shifted to the fertile coastal strip where it has been maintained ever since. Here, though much of the land was below sea level and badly drained, the new settlers could be accommodated.

Behind the coastal strip are sandy soils covered with dense hardwood forests credited as some of the most valuable in the world. These forests spread over the greater part of the country, giving way in two areas, the middle of Berbice and the Rupununi in the deep south, to savannahs, to scrub and grass-covered tablelands which are used for cattle-raising, mainly on an unscientific, unplanned basis. With the exception of a few mining and timber camps and Amerindian villages, the Interior is largely uninhabited. Only in recent years has a serious attempt been made to explore the mineral resources of the Interior and the hydroelectric potential of our large rivers and great waterfalls.

In an area of about 83,000 square miles, the estimated population in 1966 was only 674,680, made up of Indians, 342,190-50.8 per cent; Africans, 207,870 — 30.8 per cent; Mixed, 81,400-12 per cent; Chinese, 4,160 - 0.6 per cent; Portuguese, 6,120 — 0.9 per cent; other Europeans, 1,480 - 0.2 per cent, and Amerindians, 31,460 — 4.6 percent. It is increasing by about 3 percent per year and most of it is concentrated on the narrow fertile coastal strip of about 3,000 square miles.

My first task on my return to Guiana was to establish a dental practice. Soon after the arrival in December 1943 of my equipment, I set up my surgery at 69 Main Street, in the heart of Georgetown. There I resided and practiced for six years.

My family circle in Georgetown included my wife, who had arrived just before Christmas, four brothers and one sister. My one other brother and four sisters remained in Port Mourant with my parents. I felt a kind of parental responsibility to them all. Of those who lived with me, I arranged for one brother to go abroad to study dentistry, another brother to be trained as a dental technician, and the others to be enrolled at Central High School.

I soon discovered that it was easier to establish a practice than to get it going. There were few patients because, for one thing, I was practically a stranger in Georgetown. I did not know many people and did not have many contacts; the friends I knew from my college days were few.

Besides, my fees were high because I had slightly inflated ideas about the possession of a degree from one of the best dental schools, and also because I had just come back from the United States where the dollar sign was prominent in every-thing. Needless to say, instead of attracting patients my fees drove them away. Fortunately, my wife, who had trained as a nurse for two and a half years, worked as office assistant and hygienist, and one of my brothers did the dental laboratory work. Their services helped to tide over my early financial difficulties.

However, with increasing contact and identification with the people, I saw and corrected my mistakes. Indeed, I soon moved to the other extreme, so much so that at a later period I had a dispute with the Dental Association on the question of

fee-fixing. It was suggested that a minimum of $2 (8s. 4½p.) should be charged for extractions; I was then charging only $1. I argued that it was the business of a professional association not to regulate fees, but to maintain standards. I could not see why it was necessary to earn in a few minutes what it took poor people half a day or a whole day to earn, when they were fortunate enough to find employment.

This was a period of searching and frustration. I longed for some form of identification. There was no political party; the Popular Party of the late twenties and thirties had become defunct. For a while I played cricket, and soon after became addicted to bridge-playing. I spent hours and hours at bridge and read every publication on the subject. But this was in no way a satisfaction. I soon found out that it was only an escape. I wanted to identify myself with the real hard world around me.

The Legislative Council at that time was simply a debating society. It was said, with some justice, that laws were made not in the Legislative Council but over rum swizzles at the exclusive Georgetown Club, which the sugar planters and senior government officials frequented.

Three leaders - Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, the father of trade unionism and the organizer in 1922, of the British Guiana Labour Union; Ayube Edun and C. R. Jacob, the organizers in 1936 of the Man-Power Citizens' Association - spoke in the Council on behalf of the working people. Jacob had been elected in 1935, and Critchlow and Edun nominated in 1943. But they did not form any mass party. Nor did they involve the people in any significant way in their politics and protests.

Apart from the trade unions, there were the League of Coloured People (LP) and the British Guiana East Indian fought against white oppression of all Coloured people, the LCP Association (BEIA). Unlike the parent body in England which in British Guiana was the spokesman for the middle-class Africans. Concerned more with positions and places than with programmes and policies, it was both conservative and reactionary — conservative, because it wanted to preserve positions in the legislature and in the government machinery for Africans and Coloureds against the emerging Indian middle-class; and reactionary, because it opposed such measures as universal adult suffrage and the abolition of property and literacy qualifications, which would have enfranchised a proportionately larger percentage of Indians. The LCP therefore could not offer what I was looking for.

Consequently, I moved toward the BEIA where the influence of persons such as C. R. Jacob and Ayube Edun was felt. These two, particularly, were hammering away in the legislature for constitutional changes, including adult suffrage. However, I soon found that this body also had severe limitations. Its leaders were mainly professional men, businessmen, landlords and rice millers who were not prepared to face or resolve the problems of ordinary Indians. Indian landlords were not willing to take up the cause of the exploited Indian, and like the LCP, the BEIA also saw its function in middle-class terms — competition with the African middle-class for positions and places. This, to me, was a secondary matter; I was concerned with the overall plight of the workers and farmers, including the problem of discrimination in general. My views were not accepted and I moved elsewhere.

In 1945, I became the treasurer of a working-class organization, the Man-Power Citizens' Association. Unfortunately, this did not continue for long. The union machinery was against me and I was removed from office at the end of one year.

Pressure was brought to bear upon me because I objected firstly, to high expense allowances from the funds of a poor union; and secondly, to the tendency of the union leaders to collaborate with the sugar planters. Actually, the union had been already set on its course of becoming company-dominated. A few years before, one of its founder-members had been taken on to the payroll, at £100 per month, of Booker Bros., McConnell & Co. Ltd., the giant firm which owned most of the sugar plantations. This had shattered the confidence of the workers in the union. In 1945 I saw for myself that others in the leadership were inclined the same way; at the bargaining table where I sat for brief intervals it could be seen clearly that the union leadership was not prepared to fight for the workers.

At about this time the political situation was at simmering point. The Great Depression of the 1930s and falling sugar prices on the world market had left their mark. The price of sugar had fallen to the all-time low level of f8.10 per ton in 1936. Protective duties had to be imposed and other forms of assistance given to save the sugar industry, the sheet-anchor of the Caribbean, from ruin. Living standards had deteriorated.

In his book, *Warning from the West Indies*, Professor W. M. MacMillan stated that any socio-economic study of the West Indies "is... necessarily a study of poverty".

Social discontent had erupted in widespread strikes and disturbances in Trinidad in 1934; in St. Kitts in 1935; in British Guiana in 1935 and 1936; in Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica in 1938 and 1939. In many cases sugarcane fields had been set on fire. In Trinidad fires had lit up the oil belt. In Jamaica 8 people had been killed, 171 wounded and more than 700 arrested. In Guiana, at Leonora, police had opened fire on demonstrating workers in 1939, resulting in 4 killed and 4 wounded.

Because of this explosive atmosphere, the British government had appointed on August 5, 1938, a Royal Commission, headed by Lord Moyne "to investigate social and economic conditions in Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, the Windward Islands; and matters connected therewith and to make recommendations."

Because of its shocking contents, the publication of the exhaustive report had been withheld during the war; it was feared that publication would add grist to the mill of the German propaganda machine. When it was finally published in 1945, it exposed the abominable conditions under which the people were living. It pinpointed deficiencies in the

educational system, the problems of unemployment and juvenile delinquency, and the high rate of infant mortality. It highlighted the plight of the workers on sugar estates and of farmers on their small holdings. And it posed the new problem of a rapidly increasing population. "The crux of the West Indian problem," the Commissioners stated, "is a demand for better living conditions...among an expanding population..."

Since the closing years of the war, British Guiana was a ferment of ideas. The interruption of shipping from time to time and the consequent food shortages had thrown the territory back on to its own resources and had produced for the first time a national consciousness. The movement into the territory of foreign troops with new ways of living, and the recruitment of many Guyanese into the armed forces overseas, where they came into contact with widely differing cultures, led to a profound questioning of the existing order.

The Carnegie Library weekly discussion circle offered a focal point for dissent and became a stimulating experience; here one was able to speak freely. My wife and I began to make our impact and to gather round us a group of young radicals and intellectuals. Frequent letters to the press also gave expression to our emotions and ideas. The views put forward by us were mostly controversial. One controversy which brought severe criticism of my wife was her advocacy of birth control. The Catholics and the newspapers which they

controlled were angry, and neither forgot nor forgave her for this. They expressed their opposition in anti-Communist terms, but their bitterness, I believe, was due more to their fanatical opposition to birth control.

At that time anti-Communism was not fashionable as it is today; those were the halcyon days of cooperation between the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. A Marxist, H. J. M. Hubbard, was then general secretary of the Trades Union Council, and together with its president had attended the founding Congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Paris in 1945. And an Anglican clergyman, the Reverend Canon H. E. Worlledge, in a pamphlet openly advocated socialism and cooperation with the Soviet Union.

The year 1945 was epoch-making in other respects. Stalwarts whom I admired attended the West Indian Conference at the Georgetown Town Hall - Grantley Adams of Barbados, Norman Manley and Richard Hart of Jamaica, Albert Gomes of Trinidad, and our own Hubert Critchlow. Out of this meeting was born a year later the Caribbean Labour Congress with Grantley Adams as president, Richard Hart as general secretary, and Manley and Critchlow as vice-presidents. In England the Labour Party won a landslide victory, which many mistakenly hailed as a turning point in the history of the world.

In the same year, I made my first trip to Trinidad to meet its militant leaders. In San Fernando in the South, I met heads of the various unions - Mentore, president of the TUC; McDonald Moses, head of the Sugar Workers Union; and John Rojas, head of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. There I met also Jack Kelshall, head of the youth movement. In Port-of-Spain, I was able to see Albert Gomes only after literally searching for him for several days. On the political front, there were Patrick Solomon and Victor Bryan who were openly championing socialism. These were some of the "gods" I then worshipped.

By 1946, I had become convinced of the necessity for a theoretical organ and political platform. The people were on the move. Students and others who had gone to fight in the war

for democracy and freedom were now returning home. Many of them were anxious to see the implementation in their respective Caribbean countries of the principles underlying the Atlantic Charter. Unlike the planters, whose objective was the preservation of the status quo, they wanted a change. And so in 1946 were born the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) and the PAC Bulletin, the name being adopted from the Political Action Committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the U.S.A.

Jocelyn Hubbard, Ashton Chase, my wife and I were the founding members of the PAC. At first, about 60 copies of the six-page mimeographed Bulletin were circulated free of charge to a small group of important, but not so influential, persons.

The year 1946 saw also the formation of the Women's Political and Economic Organization (WPEO) led by Winifred Gaskin, Frances Stafford and my wife. This organization with Janet as general secretary also made quite an impact. She was a good administrator and a hard worker.

We battled on these various fronts until the 1947 general election which was fought under a very restricted constitution. Actually, Guyana had a chequered constitutional history. From the Dutch had been handed down the Court of Policy and the Combined Court which had placed almost unlimited powers in the hands of its occupants, the sugar planters.

A substantial change had taken place in 1921 when many local professionals and businessmen like P. N. Browne, Francis Dias, J. S. McArthur, A. B. Brown and J. A. Luckhoo had secured elected seats. By 1926, the Popular Party headed by Nelson Cannon and A. R. F. Webber had made even greater inroads. Candidates friendly to the British Guiana I Labour Union, which since the end of the war under Critchlow's leadership and with the support of sugar workers and Georgetown waterfront, railway and factory workers and tradesmen, had fought many industrial battles, won a sweeping victory. The possibility of such extensive legislative powers passing into the hands of Guyanese nationalists had so alarmed the plantocracy that in 1928, the Constitution had been changed by the substitution of the Crown Colony system, which effectively denied power to the representatives of the people.

The new Legislative Council comprised 29 members, 4 of whom were ex officio, 6 nominated official, 5 nominated non-official and 14 elected. The ex officio members were the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Colonial Treasurer. All the others except the elected members were nominated by the Governor at his discretion.

The Executive Council, the policy-making body, consisted of the Governor as chairman, 6 official members and 6 non-official. All the members, both official and non-official, were appointed by the Governor, and only 2 of them were chosen from among elected members of the Legislative Council. The franchise was severely restricted, hedged in by qualifications as to income, property and literacy, thus denying the majority of the people the right to vote and representation.

The Popular Party had petitioned against this constitutional imposition, but were unsuccessful. From time to time it agitated for further constitutional advances without results. The Moyne Commission did not suggest an increase in the number of elected members. It felt that a wider measure of representation would be secured by what it called "a wise use of the power to nominate members of the Council" and recommended that the nominated official members be replaced by nominated non-official members.

In 1943, a new constitution had been granted with a Legislative Council of 4 ex officio members including the Governor, 7 nominated non-official and 14 elected members. But elections had been postponed even though the old legislature had been constituted in 1935. The war had been given as the excuse. And to placate the have nots, Ayube Edun and H.N. Critchlow had been nominated to the Council.

One of the main contestants at the 1947 general election was the Labour Party. Formed almost overnight, it was more a group of individuals from many fronts coming together at the top than a mass organization starting from the bottom. And with only 14 elected seats to share, it could not accommodate all the ambitious individuals who wanted legislative honors. Consequently, this jockeying for position left the LCP and the BEIA still dominant.

My wife and I fought as independents. Janet was extremely popular in Georgetown, but was reluctant to stand. Somewhat of an introvert, she does not like being in the limelight. She would much sooner be left alone to make her contributions in the background. In this sense, we are completely different. Consequently, we complement each other and, in a way, assist each other. In the political sphere, she has concentrated on the organization and administrative side while I have done the research, propaganda and public speaking. Not does she care about possessions and is always willing to go out of her way to help others. She accepted without reservation my responsibility to give higher education to my brothers and sisters and never hesitated to allocate whatever financial outlay was necessary. Of my five brothers, three were sent abroad; one qualified as a dentist, one as a medical doctor, and one as a lawyer. Of my five sisters, four were trained in England and Ireland, two as nurses, one as an optician and one as a beautician; for a short while the fifth worked as an assistant in my dental surgery. As a consequence, my parents' attitude to my wife, which at the time of our marriage had been hostile, soon changed. My father, in his sentimental moments, credited most of the family's progress to her. "If Cheddi bin marry a' coolie gal me pickney would a' never get a' chance." Very much in my father's mind were the acquisitive tendencies and interminable family disputes which took place among several prominent Indian families.

It took a great deal of persuasion before she consented to stand for the Georgetown seat. My persuasion was not enough; Frank Van Sertima, Ivo Cendrecourt and Ivan Edwards, of the Transport Workers' Union also applied pressure. They greatly valued her work as organizing secretary of the British Guiana end, she agreed. Clerks Union. Percy Wight had to be removed, they said. In the end she agreed.

Percy Claude Wight, at that time virtually the owner of the Daily Argosy, had been Mayor of Georgetown for several terms, as well as member of the Legislative and Executive Councils for many years; one of his sons also held a commanding position in the government. He was the heart of reaction and an ardent supporter of colonialism.

At Janet's first public meeting at Christ Church School, it became clear that Percy Wight would lose. Almost everyone who mattered in Georgetown, from high to low, was there. Janet made a magnificent speech, which was somewhat marred by my intervention on a theoretical level with talk about the class struggle. There and then, the reactionaries persuaded John Fernandes, a businessman, to enter the race. Nicknamed "Honest John" for his religious moralizing and his charitable work, Fernandes was, and still is, one of the pivots of the Catholic Church. Then as now, they invoked the red bogey; anti-Communism became their main weapon.

Although she was most popular, Janet lost to John Fernandes, largely due to the limitation of the suffrage. A sidelight on Percy Wight's final political defeat was the voting result among the employees of the Argosy Company Ltd., which he controlled. Although all the workers voted at one polling booth, only a few votes were registered for him!

I was pitted against John D'Aguiar, Frank Jacob and H. L. Palmer in Central Demerara, the constituency adjoining Georgetown, the capital. In this contest, racism and cultism were used to blur and confuse the class issue.

D'Aguiar's backers created the image of a man of influence and power. He had represented the constituency since 1939 and with Frederick Seaford, C. V. Wight and Frank McDavid shared the limelight of planters' rule. He was a member of the Executive Council and Chairman of the strategic Rice Marketing Board (RMB). He held top positions on many other Boards and Committees. He was also managing director of J. P. Santos and Company Ltd., one of the leading commercial houses in Georgetown. Through government and business patronage, he had built up a strong machine among the managerial staff and drivers of the sugar estates, and the elders, teachers and businessmen of the villages. So certain of victory were his backers in the Catholic Church and in business circles that they concentrated their power, influence and propaganda not against me, but against my wife.

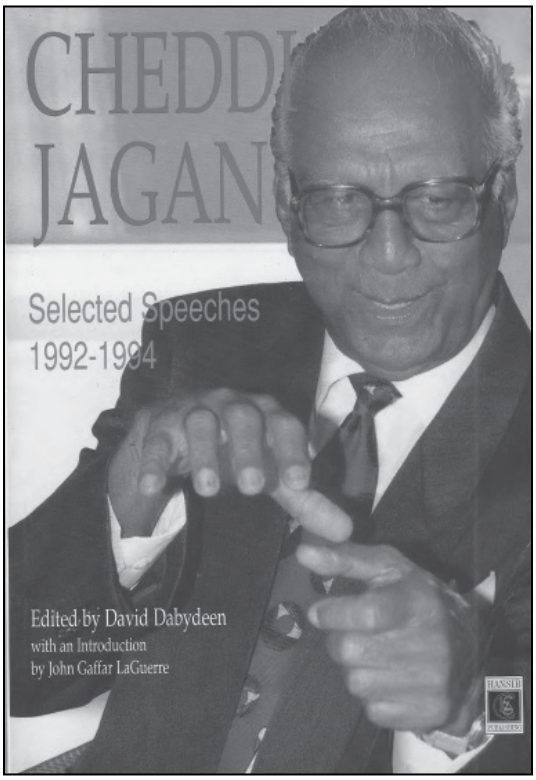
Frank Jacob, a lawyer and former Queen's College class mate, secured through the influence of his legislator-father, R. Jacob, the sponsorship of the Labour Party, which had been formed around the personality of Hubert Critchlow. By 1941, at the age of sixty-three, Critchlow had lost a great deal of his youthful drive and militancy and had fallen under the influence of the reactionary League of Coloured People. Though the Labour Party's tag was of some help to Jacob, he nevertheless made a poor showing.

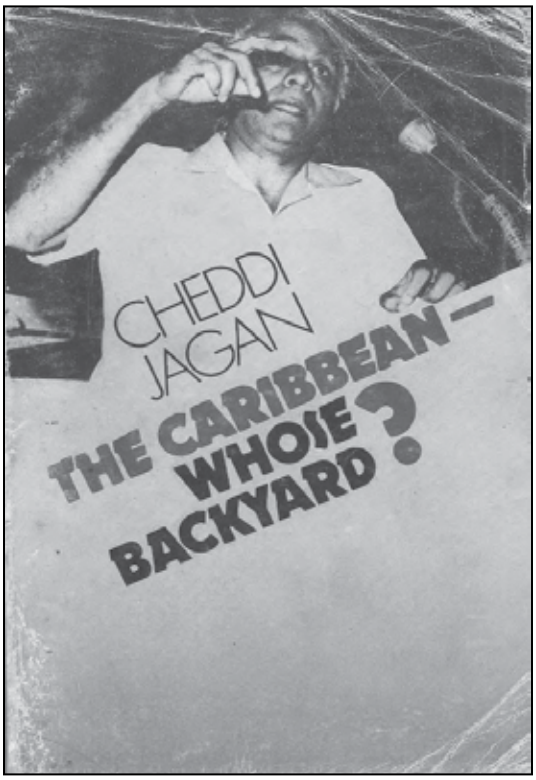
H. L. Palmer had a reputation in the field of local government. But he was quite advanced in age and thus did not have the advantage of my youth and vigour. His support came from the LCP whose particular weapon was the appeal to African racism. For example, in North Georgetown, the LCP carried out an extremely unpleasant racist campaign against H. J. M. Hubbard and succeeded in getting Dr. J. A. Nicholson elected, despite Hubbard's militant and creditable record as secretary of the TUC. In South Georgetown, the LCP caused Critchlow to lose his seat on the assertion by its vice-president that opposing candidate Frances Stafford, a white Guyanese member of the WPEO, had kicked an African servant down the stairs. The Court held this to be a damaging lie.

After the count was over, I was declared the winner by a close margin over D'Aguiar. My victory was mainly due to the fact that I had been a regular visitor on the East Coast of Demerara over a period of time, working among the rank and file quietly and unobtrusively. I won over the workers in the sugar estates by an overwhelming majority. In the villages, there was a three-way split, with votes going mainly to Palmer, D'Aguiar and myself. D'Aguiar won most of the votes of the more well-to-do and those directly influenced by the sugar planters. My support came from the working class, except those who voted for Palmer because of the racist appeal of the LCP or for Jacob because of the Labour Party tag. One of my protégés, in the villages. school teacher Sydney King of Buxton, was of great help to me in the villages.

And so I was in the legislature, an end of sorts, yet in fact only the beginning of the long, hard struggle ahead.

Publications by Dr. Cheddi Jagan





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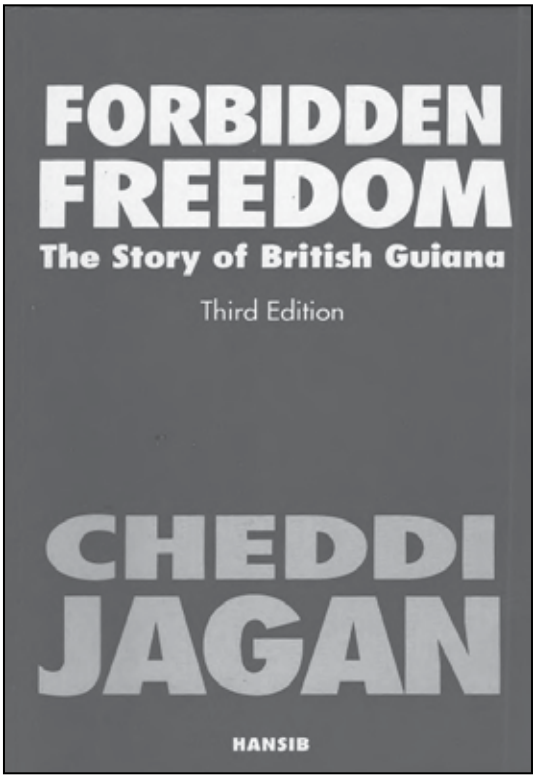

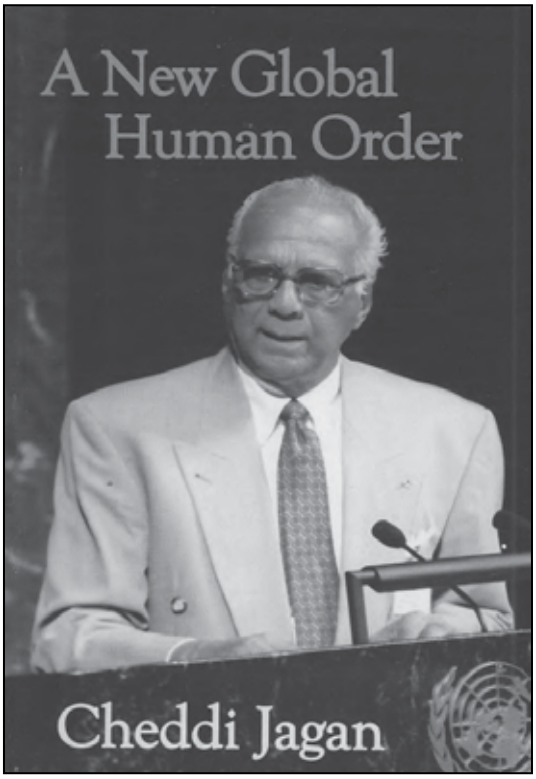

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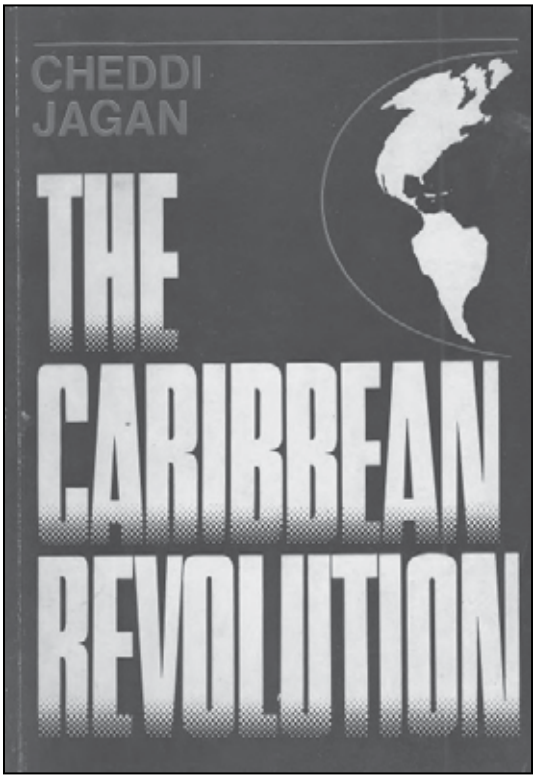

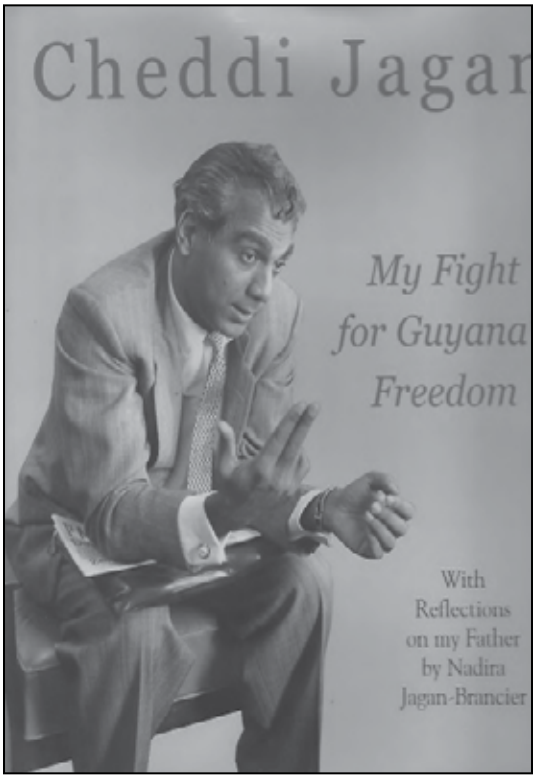

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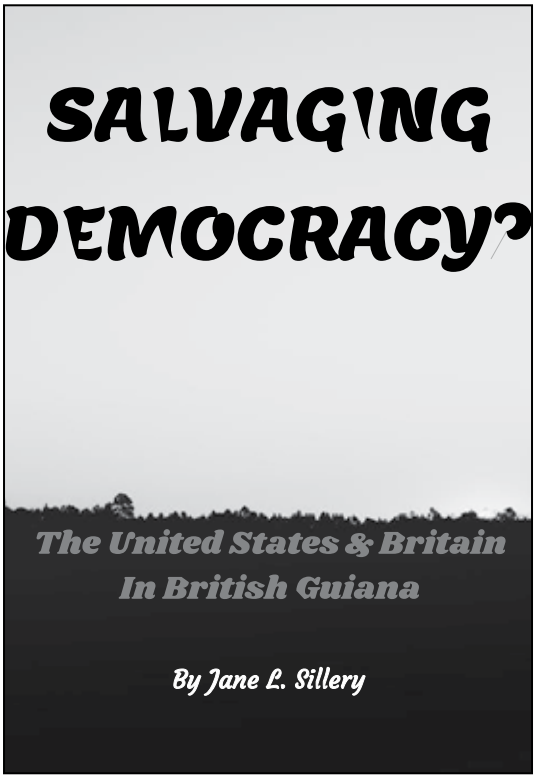

Cheddi Jagan Research Centre

The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre (CJRC) was officially opened on March 22, 2000 which was the 82nd birthday anniversary of Dr. Cheddi Jagan. The CJRC is dedicated to making available to Guyana and the world, the very rich collection of materials which captures the visionary thoughts and revolutionary ideas of the late President of Guyana, Dr. Cheddi Jagan (1918-1997)

The centre houses a large archival collection of papers, documents, photographs, audio and DVDs related to Dr. Jagan's long and enduring involvement in leading the political struggle in Guyana and at the global level. Dr. Cheddi Jagan is the Father of the Guyanese nation and a renowned and respected statesman. His immense stature in Guyana the Caribbean and the world at large stems from his ground-breaking contributions in numerous stages of the struggle for a better life for the people of Guyana and the world at large.

These include:

1. The struggle against the British to end colonial rule through political independence.
2. Governing for the bene□t of the Guyanese people in the colonial period in 1953 and 1957 to 1964 and as the □rst democratically elected President of independent Guyana from 1992-1997.
3. The international struggle for an end to poverty and inequality through a New Global Human Order.

The CJRC's aims and objectives are to publish material and promote research on the life, work and ideas of Dr. Jagan which is intertwined with the history of Guyana as a whole from the early 1940's to the late 1990's.

Moreover, the collection is indispensable to any analysis of Guyana's post-war social, economic and political development, since Dr. Jagan's work and thoughts have had such a powerful resonance with his country and beyond.

Conference Room Rental

The Conference room is available for rental to host meetings, seminars and workshops

CONTACT US

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Email: cjresearchcentre@gmail.com
Website: http://jagan.org

Opening hours: Monday – Friday (9:00 am – 4:00pm)

Admission – FREE!

The Cheddi Jagan Research Centre is dedicated to making available to the Guyanese and international communities the Legacy and Work of the Late President of Guyana Dr. Cheddi Jagan through research and education. The Centre is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation located at the Red House. (picture below)

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