GUYANA JANET JAGAN

'100 Years Under British Rule rather than one year under Jagan', a slogan waved aloft by the Opposition to the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana, gives a keyhole look at what is behind the conflict in the small South American Colony seeking independence. The United Force, representing the moneyed, right-wing Catholic interests, prefers British or American control of the country rather than government by the PPP which has a declared socialist policy. And to achieve its end it has started a John Birth-type hysteria to the effect that every act of the PPP brings the country closer to 'Soviet slavery'. The control of two daily newspapers has made their task easier.

Also making their task easier has been the covert collusion with the United Force of the People's National Congress, the Party led by Forbes Burnham, onetime Chairman of the PPP. Professing a socialist policy, and on occasion, using the socially accepted phraseology ranging from 'democratic socialism' to 'to each according to his needs', Burnham cleanses himself periodically by uttering statements like the following at press conferences in New York. Last year he played up to anti-Cuban hysteria in the U.S. by declaring that there were 1,000 Cubans in British Guiana, many having come in secretly through the borders. (There was actually one Cuban in the country when he made his announcement). This year, in New York, he told the press that he was the champion of the battle against communism in the Caribbean. He is reported in the Pittsburg Courier as charging Dr. Jagan with leading the country into the 'Soviet Sphere' and receiving $5.5 million from the Soviet Union.

When the PPP carried a picket line around Government House last year demanding independence and accusing British Colonial policy of prolonging the stagnation of the economy and creating/unemployment problem, Burnham's PNC men attacked the picket line. 'We don't want independence' members of the PNC shouted at me in the picket line. And basically, this is one of the problems in British Guiana. There has been no united call for independence. In fact, the Opposition parties in British Guiana have clearly indicated that they do not want independence if the People's Progressive Party is at the helm. This strange, colonial outlook has been nurtured and fed by conservative and reactionary interests in the United States of America, United Kingdom and in British Guiana.

The results of the October London Conference confirm that the slogan of 'no independence under Jagan' has been supported in full by the Colonial Office. Every possible stop-gap has been used to prevent the PPP from being in office when the British are finally ready to transfer power in British Guiana.

THE BACKGROUND

In the three elections that have been held in British Guiana since the formation of political parties and the introduction of adult suffrage, the People's Progressive Party has won each time. In 1953, the British Government suspended the Constitution and removed the PPP Ministers from office after 4½ months. A handpicked, puppet Government headed by the British appointed Governor ruled the country up to 1957. With endless restrictions and curtailment of civil liberties which would cause even the segregationists in the American South a gasp of horror, they planned the political death of the PPP. Added to restrictions on movement, arrests, jailing without trail, a split in the PPP was engineered and a decapitation of the Trade Union Council achieved. Thus, with all the cards in their favour, the British Colonial Office allowed another election, but not before making sure that the constituency boundaries were fixed against any possible PPP victory. A total upset took place. The PPP won nine out of fourteen elected seats. So fraudulent were the 'gerrymandered' constituency boundaries, that the leader of the PPP Dr. Jagan, polled more votes from his constituency than did the five winning candidates of the Opposition.

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In 1961, elections were held. This time constituency boundaries were again manipulated by a British boundary commissioner. The PPP alone protested vehemently against the decisions of the boundary commission. But the protests were ignored and elections were held, with the British Colonial Secretary fully in charge of the conduct of the elections. In other words, the rules of the game and the umpire were set and controlled by the British. This is important to note, because Sandys has subtly sniped at the PPP in saying that an electoral commission must conduct the next elections in order to keep a balance and prevent fraud. The attitude of the Colonial Secretary is strange because in the three elections in which the PPP has won, the British have been fully in charge of every single bit of machinery, and no one has accused the PPP of winning by corrupt methods.

All the parties went into the 1961 elections with the understanding that independence would come shortly after elections. The PNC, certain of its own victory, had agreed that the next elected Government would be the government in office when the transfer of power took place. It said that independence would follow in a few months and fixed May 31st, 1962 as the date of independence. But having lost the elections, it started a new campaign under the slogan 'no independence under Jagan'.

Since the PPP won a majority at the 1961 elections and formed a Government, developments have been of a counter-revolutionary nature, with internal and external forces of reaction combining in scarcely disguised attempts to over throw the democratically elected government of the country.

The expectation of the establishment of a progressive Government in a capitalist country is bound to provoke wild hysteria, in the ranks of the bourgeoisie. When this prospect appears in a colonial-capitalist country, then reactions are even more frantic.

The struggle in Guyana has never been merely a nationalist struggle for independence. The people have been fighting simultaneously for reforms, and for economic independence. They have been inspired by socialism. As our country neared the crossing to independence, old capitalist fears, whipped up in 1953 for the suspension of the constitution, gained wide circulation on the platform of the United Force, led by capitalist, beer brewer, Peter D'Aguiar. The February, 1962 disturbances represented the efforts of privileged imperialist-oriented cliques in Guyana, led by D'Aguiar, to obstruct independence, the achievement of which seemed imminent, and to stave off certain reforms that the Government had started to introduce. These reforms comprised currency controls, taxation, moves towards Government-initiated industrialization, and liberalization and expansion of trade with East and West.

U.S. INTERFERENCE

Peter D'Aguiar has done much to bring in the Americans into British Guiana. During the last elections, the Fred Schwarz 'Anti-Communist Crusade' publicly declared that it spent $45,000 through D'Aguiar's United Force Party to defeat the People's Progressive Party. In fact much more than this was spent.
It is an open secret that the Commonwealth Secretary of State, Duncan Sandys and Colonial Office Officials were brought under increasing pressure by the U.S. State Department to deny Guyana its independence. During the last strike, Dean Rusk was reported in the local press to have called on the British Government to suspend the Constitution. A high U.S. State Department official has admitted before a Congressional Appropriations Committee that the U.S. Government was anxious to see the PPP Government removed from office.

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Perhaps the single biggest source of conflict in British Guiana is the entangled contradiction presented by the Trades Union Council of British Guiana. Among one of the crimes of the British imperialists in 1953, apart from the suspension of the Constitution, was the smashing of the militant and bona fide trade union movement and the imposition of a totally new Trades Union Council. The present Trades Union Council is the disfigured child of imperialist high-handedness. Over the years it has become an undisguised vehicle of United States penetration in Guyana, a shameless collaborator with big business and the local bourgeoisie, and a working tool of the People's National Congress, and to a lesser extent of the United Force.

The Trades Union Council was roundly condemned by the Commonwealth Commission in 1962. Its politics was openly exposed and denounced. Robert Willis of the British TUC (who was sent to mediate during the last strike) saw clearly through the intentions and machinations of the leaders of the local TUC. So also did Nicholas Pollard, Assistant Secretary of the Latin American Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, who recently condemned the TUC for its political ambitions, its overt antipathy towards the Government, and its subservience to the Americans.

The General Strike, called by the TUC and supported by the majority of big business firms, was financed from the USA. The strike failed because at least 50 per cent of the workers refused to join it. The President of the TUC, whose sugar workers' union is represented at the TUC Annual Conference by 61 votes out of 130, failed to get his members to down tools. The strike was called ostensibly in protest to the Labour Relations Bill, the same Bill which the PPP Government attempted to put into law in 1953 and which, then, was supported by the TUC. The purpose of this Bill was to bring about compulsory recognition of trade unions where there is none and to enforce recognition of the most popular where there is more than one union, through a democratic vote by the workers themselves. The effect of the Bill most certainly would have been to rid workers of unpopular company unions and of corrupt trade union leaders.

In reality, the strike and subsequent violence was initiated in a second attempt to bring down the elected Government and supply further excuses for the British to delay independence.

RACE CONFLICTS

Much has been said by Colonial Secretary Sandys on race conflict in British Guiana. He has used this as an excuse to alter the electoral arrangements from first-past-the-post to proportional representation. This is an unprecedented step in the British Commonwealth and is clearly an excuse to prevent, once again, the PPP from winning at any new elections. British Guiana has a multi-racial population divided as follows - East Indian descent 49.2 per cent, African descent 31.7 per cent, Mixed descent 12.2 per cent, Amerindian 4.6 per cent, Portuguese 1.2 per cent, Chinese 0.7 per cent and Europeans 0.4 per cent.

The foundations of multi-racial unity, and non-racial politics were rudely shattered by the suspension of the liberal constitution of 1953 by the British Government. The 1953 Government was unique in the fact that it was a party Government of a national character that involved the enthusiastic support of the masses of all races.

The British Government later in 1955, engineered the split in the PPP by holding out opportunistic offers to Forbes Burnham, a lawyer of African descent, and former Chairman of the PPP.

Burnham who later formed his own party, now known as the People's National Congress, exploited racial undercurrents and achieved a 60 to 70 per cent withdrawal of Afro-Guianese from the PPP.

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Burnham, having failed, first to capture the leadership of the PPP, and then to win over mass following, has been forced more and more into establishing himself as the leader of a race group, a position that he feels should grant him immunity from what might have been an inevitable political decline. He is at the same time able to reassure the imperialists, British and American, that the race pattern will be the last bulwark on which they can trust, in view of the strengthening position of Dr. Jagan.

The PNC's growing reliance on racial politics was emphasised by a prominent sociologist, Professor Raymond Smith (now Head of the Department of Sociology in Ghana). In his book,"British Guiana", he wrote:

> In the absence of any serious ideological difference between them (Jagan and Burnham), and given the fact that Mr. Burnham has broken away from the main party which is still the repository of socialist doctrine, Mr. Burnham inevitably has to depend upon an appeal to the urban Negro electorate. The most serious problem of British Guiana's politics is the fact that Mr. Burnham's party is becoming more and more purely negro in character, and worse still, that many of his supporters are becoming anti-Indian.

Because of unremitting propaganda many Afro-Guianese have been deluged with irrational fears of 'Indian domination'. What has made this a factor of practical and potential danger to orderly and stable Government is the fact that Afro-Guianese constitute 75.4 per cent, Indo-Guianese 16.5 per cent of the Police Force of 1,451; in the Civil Administration Afro-Guianese are estimated at 60 per cent, while of 3,199 primary school teachers 2,000 are Afro-Guianese, and 974 are Indo-Guianese.

The PNC by its racist degeneracy has been able to convert the hitherto unquestioned imbalance in these important spheres of the state machinery into turbulent political blackmail. With race and politics penetrating these spheres, and with the consequent undermining of traditional impartiality and loyalty and the overwhelming numerical superiority of anti-Government public servants the state machinery has been, and is being deployed against the Government it constitutionally should serve.

It was against this background that the London conference on independence took place in October. Outside pressures coupled with an anti-socialist Conservative party in power have resulted in a deliberate 'fix' of the constitution to prevent the PPP from gaining power, as in the past, by democratic elections. A system of proportional representation has been imposed and a date for independence further postponed.

Clearly the British Government wants to be certain that should the PPP win for the fourth time, independence would still not be forthcoming. The attitude of the British Government is, simply, that it supports democracy and the electoral process, once the results suit it. Once the results are against its desires, it shamelessly flouts the democratic process.

The People's Progressive Party has categorically rejected the Sandys imposition and will carry on the fight for freedom and independence for the Guianese people.