

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN GUYANA

By

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In Guyana at the moment there is a fundamental crisis which involves every major dimension of national life. In the economy, in the work system, in social life in general, in the political system and state structures, in the legal system, in cultural life, public morality, in our psychological states, in other words everywhere the crisis manifests itself. In its range and pervasion the crisis matches those which accompanied the breakup of slavery in the 1830s, the destruction of quasi-slavery (indentured immigration in 1917, the world wide economic collapse in the 1930s and the more recent struggles for independence. How can we comprehend such a multi-faceted crisis? What can political struggle contribute towards the resolution of this crisis? These and other related themes will constitute the basis for this essay.

At the heart of the crisis is the shocking reality that there has been the virtual destruction and consequent collapse of the production system in the country. This collapse has resulted in a rapid deterioration in the standards of living, real earnings and wages of the mass of Guyanese workers and peasants. We have therefore to begin by understanding the scope of this production crisis. But in trying to understand it we must constantly bear in mind who owns and/or controls the main production sectors. Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC) government, which came to power in November 1964, as a result of a collaboration in an Anglo-U.S. manoeuvre to oust the People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Dr. Jagan, and exclude the masses from the independence settlement has, under the pretext of "co-operative socialism," direct or indirect control over 80 percent of the economy. It is from their position within the state structure that the PNC is seeking to create the material base for the reproduction of the ruling class which they represent. These features of social relations dominate the system of production.

The Production Crisis

A decade and a half after independence the economy is still dependent on three primary commodities -- rice, bauxite-alumina and sugar. These account for over 80 percent of the exports and are the largest contributing sectors to the national product. The bauxite-alumina and sugar industries were both "nationalized" by the PNC, while the rice industry, although based on peasant production, is controlled by the state market-

ing agency and its affiliated rice-processing facilities. This state control accounts for 90 percent of the processing of rice. The control of these sectors is responsible for the government's frequent boast that "it owns and controls 80 percent of the national economy." It is the real material foundation on which the PNC is seeking to constitute a ruling class.

How has the economy fared under PNC direction? In 1980 we produced 270,000 tons of sugar compared with 369,000 tons in 1971, a figure which has never been surpassed. The government's target for 1980 was 335,000 tons of sugar. The present capacity of the industry is of the order of 450,000 per annum! In 1980 we produced 160,000 tons of rice, compared with 142,000 tons in 1970. The target for 1980 was 200,000 tons and the capacity of the industry is of the order of 250,000 tons of rice per annum. Dried bauxite production in 1980 was 1.6 million tons compared with 2.3 million tons in 1970. Calcined bauxite produced in 1980 was 602,000 compared with 692,000 tons in 1970. Alumina production was 211,000 tons in 1980 compared with 312,000 tons in 1970. The overall short-fall on the targets set by the government itself for 1980 was 20 percent. The PNC takeover of the economy has therefore been accompanied by rapid destruction.

In addition to the collapse of the main producing sectors other sectors of the national economy have also been failing, e.g., domestic foodstuffs, services and so on. In particular, it should be mentioned here, the system of public utilities has virtually collapsed. Electricity, water-supply, public transport, telephone services, the Post Office, all have deteriorated to levels unheard of before. The public services have also deteriorated rapidly: education, housing, social welfare and the medical services. Thus there is in Guyana one doctor per 15,000 inhabitants. In the state health services foreign medical personnel account for 75 percent of the doctors! Less than 10 percent of health personnel is engaged in preventative medicine and almost all the health facilities are confined to the urban areas, with the exception (because of the plantation legacy) of the rudimentary medical facilities on the sugar estates. In housing, the targeted production for the period 1972-1976 was 65,000 housing units. Of these 6,000 houses were built during this period. Since then, with the collapse of the economy, housing construction is at a virtual standstill.

The result of the above has been an estimated decline in real per capita income of the order of 44 percent between 1976-80. In no year since 1976 has the GDP, measured in current prices, shown an increase on the previous year (except in 1978 when a 1 percent increase was recorded). When to this negative growth we add the effects of price increases and allow for population growth, it is not surprising that the real per capita income has fallen.

This declining economy has been accompanied by increasing unemployment (now estimated at over 40 percent of the labour force), widespread inflation currently at a double digit rate annually, and shortages of everything from food to spare parts. In addition the balance of payments and foreign exchange position of the country has deteriorated sharply. This is partly due to the declining output of the main export commodities and the high price of imports. But it is also due to the external debt burden which has increased tremendously because of the fact that the "nationalisations" were in effect commercial purchases (at very advantageous terms to the sellers). As a result nationalisation has converted a national asset into national debt.

The government's initial response to this crisis was to buy time by printing money and borrowing. Between 1973-75 the money supply doubled! Between 1975 and 1977 it grew by about 38 percent. In 1976 an IMF program was introduced which helped to halt this runaway increase, but yet the increase per annum has been since then in the double digit region. The public debt which was \$267 million in 1970 reached \$638 million in 1973 and has since grown to more than \$2.5 billion dollars today. It is no surprise therefore that the foreign exchange reserves have fallen from levels of over \$250 million in 1975 to minus \$350 million at the end of 1980.

Printing money and borrowing only added fuel to a crisis which was at this time worsening on the external front, on account of the world wide inflation, the "oil crisis," and the crisis of accumulation in the main capitalist centers. It was this which made the government turn to the IMF in 1978 for help. Although it had to abandon that program, and a later one renegotiated in 1979, because of its inability to meet the IMF target, a third IMF program was initiated in 1980. This contrasts with the IMF treatment of Jamaica under Manley and can only be explained by two things, namely (1) continued American-CIA support for Burnham and the PNC in Guyana and, (2) the fact that the main lines of government policy conformed to that of the IMF. The main focus of government policy has been to seek to reduce workers' living standards in order to reduce consumption and hence the demand for imports. This, it is expected, would help to relieve the balance of payments problem and foreign exchange reserves position of the country.

To achieve this the government's assault on the workers' standard of living began in 1976 and the main mechanisms used were:

(1) the removal of all government subsidies, most of which were of long standing and introduced in order to alleviate obvious and acute hardships among the poorest sections of the community;

(2) increased taxation, mainly indirect taxes which fall heaviest on the poor, in order to raise state revenue and substitute for the failure of the state enterprises to generate surpluses under their mismanagement, open corruption and alienation of the work force in these enterprises;

(3) increased prices for all items sold which passed through state agencies;

(4) retrenchment of workers employed in the state sector in order to reduce government spending. In 1976 state expenditure was cut by 30 percent!

(5) a freeze on all wage increases in order to reduce the real value of the workers wage and so reduce consumption and imports;

(6) severe foreign exchange rationing;

(7) cuts in social spending in order to reinforce the cuts in state expenditure.

To these the IMF merely added restrictions on government borrowing. The anti-working class character of the government's policy was already formed before its approach to the IMF in 1978. It was expected by the government that these policies would turn around the economy as they saw it, but since 1976 the economy has not improved. Instead it has progressively deteriorated. Foreign exchange rationing and reduced production have also created severe shortages of everything, as already stated, from food to spare parts. This in turn has reduced the capacity of the economy to produce. When to this is added the other social and political factors which have alienated the workers, which will be discussed later, it helps to explain why the work force cannot and indeed will not increase productivity at this stage.

Before leaving this production crisis it is apposite to note four further striking features. First by 1980, debt charges payment by the state accounted for 37 percent of current expenditure as compared with 32 percent and 31 percent respectively for expenditure on personal emoluments and social services! Second, expenditure on the security services has grown. Ken Dadds has estimated that one in every 35 persons in Guyana belong to one or other state security services. This is why known current expenditure on the army, police and national service alone accounted for 18 percent of the current expenditure in 1980. Third, despite the government's boast of controlling 80 percent of the economy there is in fact no planning of the state sector, let alone the national economy. Apart from spectacular failures like the Road to Brazil, the potato scheme, cas-

sava factories, the glass factory(not yet commissioned because of unreliable electricity supply), the toothpick factory which worked for one week, and so on, the record shows that the only plan produced was a 1972-76 plan first published as a draft in June 1973 just before the national elections held in July 1973. Since then this has not been revised. In the budgets presented after 1976 various Ministers of Finance have claimed that the 1972-76 plan is being "rolled over" each year. No publication indicating this has been forthcoming, despite the establishment of a so-called state planning commission in 1978. In the absence of any plan mismanagement has become a way of life. Economic development becomes the manufacture of promises as the government moves from one gimmick project to another. Finally, in all this the state bureaucracy has been expanding rapidly, as jobs for party supporters and other such types have been provided as a means of maintaining support for the party in power. Those who have achieved these jobs have used their preferred positions to institute a system of corruption that is unparalleled in our history.

The Political Crisis

Attack on the Industrial Relations System: In the face of retrenchment, subsidies removal, tax increases, shortages and discriminatory distribution of commodities, worker discontent and rebellion are everywhere in evidence as the workers naturally seek to defend their living standards. The PNC has used the state to crush this rebellion in a variety of ways including the following:

(1) By manipulating and controlling the executives of the various unions and the resulting composition of the national Trades Union Council (TUC). This has been made easy through resort to rigged union elections and the exclusion of the Guyanese Workers Agricultural Union (GAWU, the largest union in the country and under the control of the PPP) until 1976 from the TUC. In addition, control of the majority of jobs in the country by the government (because most people are state employees in the nationalized sections) has aided the efforts to control worker organisations.

(2) To buttress this effort even further, the government has evolved the doctrine of the "political strike." This doctrine says in effect that any strike which the government (also the main employer) does not sanction is "political." Once the strike is deemed political, it becomes subversion and the full use of the state's repressive apparatuses is justified in order to crush such strikes. Thus in the 1977 sugar strike and again during the bauxite support strike called in August 1979, state employees and security personnel were used as scabs to keep production going. In addition, military personnel were used to

physically restrain strikers, with tear-gassing and violence being routine repressive measures. In addition, those persons identified as leaders of the strike were fired. This latter occurrence was of particular note in the strikes held during the 1978 Referendum and the 1979 strike referred to above.

(3) In all this policy of repression of worker organisations the client TUC, which the government has created, has been treated with scant respect. Thus the 1978 agreement with the IMF was signed without consultation with the TUC despite its grave implications for the work force. Similarly the Minimum Wage Agreement entered into between the Government and the TUC for the three year period (1977-79) was unilaterally terminated by the government in 1978 and the wage freeze referred to earlier introduced without consultation with the TUC!

Attack on Human Rights and Rule of Law: The assault on workers' living standards led to an assault on the system of worker bargaining and industrial relations. But since this is part of the wider framework of the legal system and human rights, it inevitably led to repression in this area as well. The attacks here were directed both towards the courts and the law. There are numerous examples; among the more famous are:

(1) Flying of the PNC flag over the Court of Appeal in order to assert its "paramountcy" over all state institutions;

(2) The flight of judges from the judiciary;

(3) The introduction of legislation with retroactive effect (the so-called Administration of Justice Act) designed to reverse a court decision given against the state and condemned by the legal association.

(4) The use of the National Security Act with its wide powers of search and arrest to "legally" harass its opponents;

(5) The use of torture and inhumane treatment against arrested persons;

(6) The arbitrary refusals to permit pickets, public demonstrations and public meetings.

Attack on constitutional-political rights: The experience in Guyana has been that:

(1) repression of the work force has inevitably and inexorably led to repression of law and human rights,

(2) the repression of the rule of law/human rights has also inevitably and inexorably led to repression of constitutional

and political rights. This latter transition marks a further stage in the development of reaction and counter-revolution in face of declining popular support, a collapsing economy and the ruling party still maintaining control of the state. The government's ideological defence for this repression has been the doctrine of "paramountcy of the party." We will take this doctrine up later. It is first of all necessary here to highlight the main assaults on constitutional and political rights:

- (a) the elections held in 1973 were rigged;
- (b) local government elections constitutionally due every two years since 1970 were never held;
- (c) in 1978 when elections were constitutionally due, they were postponed and a "Referendum" was in fact held in its stead.

In a publication produced by a Committee of Concerned Citizens it was pointed out that, of the maximum possible turnout of voters, 14.01 percent of the total electorate voted. Yet the government claimed a turnout of 71.45 percent with itself winning 97.7 percent of the votes cast!

In that Referendum political opposition to the government reached new heights. All the opposition parties supported the call for a boycott of the Referendum and their highly visible success marked the beginning of the present phase of confrontation between the PNC dictatorship and the people.

In the 1978 Referendum the Working People's Alliance showed both its strength and rapid growth into maturity. There is no doubt that it was the leading force in the boycott campaign. As a result, from that point on the future of the country came to hinge critically on the mobilizing capacity of that organisation. Fortunately, the WPA is the first genuine multi-racial political organisation (except possibly the original PPP in 1953) to emerge in Guyana with a popular base, an ideology and program deeply rooted in the historical and social experiences of the broad mass of the dispossessed Guyanese people.

Finally, the object of the 1978 Referendum was to rig the Constitution, and as the PNC anticipated then, do away with even the need to hold rigged elections. In this they failed. The opposition generated in 1978 gained momentum. And, when, in 1979, after the "seat of paramountcy" was burned down, (i.e., the Ministry of National Development Office of the General Secretary of the PNC -- a combination of a government department and the party office entirely financed by state funds and the work of which was entirely PNC oriented), the WPA was framed and charged as being

responsible. Walter Rodney, Dr. Omowale and Rupert Roopnarine were charged with this offence. The reaction against this and the campaign which followed led directly to the formal promulgation of the WPA as a political party. The combined opposition of the WPA and other forces were met with two postponements of elections constitutionally due in 1978, totalling 27 months and the creation of an extraordinary constitution designed to serve one man. Under this Constitution, by law Burnham became President in November 1980 "as he had been elected hereto." As President under this Constitution he commands an array of powers far exceeding those of an absolute monarch or even the old Colonial Office Governors. This can be seen in that under the present Constitution:

(a) Article 182(1) says that the President "shall not be personally answerable to any court for the performance of the functions of his office or for any act done in the performance of those functions, and no proceedings, whether criminal or civil, shall be instituted against him in his personal capacity in respect thereof either during his term of office or thereafter."

(b) The President is Head of State, Supreme Executive Authority and Commander-in-Chief. In addition he is supreme over the National Assembly, the local democratic organs, the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs and the Supreme Congress of the People, all created by the new constitution, because he has powers to summon, suspend or dissolve all these so-called "democratic" and "supreme" organs. He has a veto over the National Assembly.

(c) In addition the President determines the appointment of the Chairman of the Elections Commission, Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Chairman of the Police Service Commission, Chairman of the Judicial Commission, and Chairman of the Teachers' Commission. Moreover, he has the right to appoint either a majority of the members or the whole commission. In addition, he appoints the Army Chief of Staff and army commanders, the Director-General of the National Service and the deputy directors general, the Commissioner of Police and his deputies, the Attorney General, the Chancellor of the Judiciary, the Chief Justice, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and literally every other important official of the state. Even to many of Burnham's remaining supporters the powers are frightening. Indeed this fear may well account for their support. Before leaving this point it is worth observing that these absolute powers conferred on the "leader" fall within the traditions of the PNC. In that party's constitution it is stated that the "Reserve Powers of the Leader are:

(i) If the leader in his deliberate judgement is

of the opinion that a situation of emergency has arisen in the Party, he shall have power notwithstanding any provision in these Rules, on giving written notice to the General Secretary of his opinion, to take all action that he may in his absolute discretion consider necessary to correct such a situation; and for this purpose he may assume and exercise any or all of the powers of the Biennial Delegates' Congress, the General Council, the Central Executive Committee, any other Committee, Group, Arm, Organ or of any officer or official of the Party.

(ii) If General Council, the Central Executive Committee or the Administrative Committee has not been constituted or for any reason cannot function, the Leader may exercise all or any of its powers or may authorise such members as he may deem fit to exercise its powers for the time being."

State Violence: As reaction develops, repression of the constitutional and political rights has developed to its penultimate stages; i.e., the use of state violence, political murder and open terrorist rule as a means of containing opposition. Right now most of this violence is directed towards the WPA, which underscores its militancy. More significantly however such violence will inevitably spread to other social sectors and other political organisations. Already many former members of the PNC have been victims of the terrorist rule.

Examples of this increased use of state violence are:

- the murders of Father Bernard Darke, Ohene Koama, Edward Dublin and Walter Rodney
- the charges of treason now before the courts
- the use of PNC thugs to attack opposition members
- the intimidating surveillance of known opposition activists.

In this climate, recently a spate of "criminal murders" has hit the country. In face of all this we do not find it surprising therefore that the bizarre Jonestown murders could have happened here in Guyana. The social climate favours all the revelations of violence and the existence of a state within a state which have come in the wake of Jonestown. The refusal of the government to conduct any inquiry into this matter merely underscores this observation.

At this state of repression the government has clearly become a dictatorship. This dictatorship is the only way the state can maintain power, and impose on the working people anti-working class policies wrapped up under the claim of the legitimacy of

the paramouncy of the PNC and in particular its leader, over all state organs and political parties in a multi-party political system! Before we turn to look at the WPA's political strategy in response to this repression, we must first make a few comments on the security services and the media, and then examine the recent "elections."

The Degeneration of the Security Services:

(1) In this situation not only has the numbers of security personnel multiplied, but the state itself has become almost exclusively oriented towards "security" matters, which is another way of saying towards the harassment of the political opposition. This adds to the burdens of the economy in two directions. First, through the increased use of the surplus for these "economically non-productive" purposes and secondly through the misdirection of state effort which this necessarily entails in the context of the state's necessary economic reproduction functions, given its 80 percent ownership and control of the economy.

(2) The security services are also distinguished by the number of separate organisations, such as the Guyanese Defence Force (GDF), Police, Guyanese National Service (GNS), Peoples' Militia, National Guard Services, etc. Further, the security services are forced into partisanship. Security personnel can openly support the PNC but none dare whisper, and be heard, any word of support for any other political party. Security personnel are therefore routinely used to support the PNC dictatorship and its system of rigged elections, repression and undemocratic rule. In addition for much of the period under review, they have been forced to spy on and harass the political oppositions. Finally, within the security services there are separate "organisations" of well-known PNC elements. These virtually constitute a "service" within a "service." These complement a number of private partisan bodies: PNC thugs, House of Israel supporters, Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSB) members. These are all armed by the state and therefore constitute a further line of its defence against the people. It should be remarked that the evidence shows that many of the national security exercises are often openly against the WPA. Instead of being directed to external enemies the enemies are almost always projected as being within, and therefore against the PNC dictatorship.

Party Propaganda: To help secure its hold on the state, the PNC has used all the ideological apparatuses of the state to project its paramouncy. The ideological line is to identify Burnham as the PNC, the PNC as the State and the State as the country as a whole or the society at large. All anti-PNC or anti-Burnham activity is therefore projected as being anti-state or anti-national interests and hence subversive. The means to put this propaganda line into effect has been nationalization

of the private media and refusal to permit opposition groups to publish their own organs or use the state organs to propagandize their ideas. Thus the "national" radio stations and "national" press are PNC in the most insulting sense. The language used, and the style of reporting perhaps give the quickest insights into the degeneracy of the political culture which has accompanied the dictatorship. Meanwhile the opposition finds that the organ of the PPP, the Mirror is refused newsprint; the Catholic Standard (published by the Roman Catholic Church) cannot use the state facilities; the organ of WPA (Dayclean) is published illegally, with two of its leading members having had to go to prison because of same; the printing machinery and equipment of the Working Peoples Vanguard Party have been seized by the police and not yet returned.

These controls of the media facilitate cover-ups of the evidence of terrorist methods of rule. Even the national parliament cannot be heard or read through these media, thereby removing the last vestige of usefulness of Parliament to the opposition. Thus it was possible to clamp the news lid on the Jonestown murders, the murders of Teekah (a Government Minister of Education), the assassinations of Rodney, Koama, Dublin and Darke. Indeed this policy is complemented by a parliamentary process in which the speaker of the parliament can rule that none of these matters listed here were of sufficient national importance to warrant a debate in Parliament!

A further complement to this mis-use of the media has been attempts to force the participation of the public in PNC events. State employees are routinely forced to attend PNC events, or risk losing their jobs. When these events are held, state facilities are commandeered and given over to the PNC free of charge to organize these events. This development is, of course, common to many dictatorships, particularly in the context of a populist tradition in politics such as we have in Guyana. More threatening for us is the phenomenon of the dictator coming to believe that the crowds are evidence of "real" support, and that the unpopularity of the regime is merely the propagandizing of a few dissidents and oppositionist elements who should be removed. This stage of self-deception is the most dangerous, as it merges into the use of state violence and political murder. In this process the regime comes to misjudge its own capacity for action, (i.e., repression), and the extent to which it will be "popularly" accepted. In the process of finding out its miscalculation, the evidence shows that many, many tragedies occur.

The 1980 General "Elections"

In the face of this unfolding crisis the WPA campaigned successfully for a boycott of the 1980 elections which the PNC finally decided to stage after they had first made sure of the

assassination of Rodney. The reasons advanced for this boycott are all to be derived from the analysis of the crisis as outlined above. We believed that the PNC had no choice but to rig the elections and contesting them therefore could only serve to give some "legitimacy" to that rigging and so provide cover to the dictatorship. We were under no illusions as to what a successful boycott would mean. We knew that it could not of and by itself bring down the government. We therefore made clear that it was a part of the process of constructing a new consciousness, a new politics, a new system of political mobilization and a new culture of resistance without which the dictatorship cannot be defeated. We conceived and staged the boycott as a step towards civil disobedience and mass agitation to remove the dictatorship. We were careful to stress that, in the elections, the PNC were seeking not only to legitimize the de facto one party state of its rule, but also its method of rule as exemplified in the Constitution which it imposed on the people. To us the Parliament is clearly Burnham's parliament. It could never, therefore, be constituted as a parliament where struggle on behalf of the people could take place. In this way we see the dictatorship of the PNC as much, much, much more retrograde than the formal dictatorship of the previous colonial power. (Emphasis added. Ed.K.M.) We therefore felt that the boycott would be one of the main instruments of highlighting the weakness of the enemy. We argued that despite all its leverage over the economy, the forces of repression, the means of propaganda, and the courts, the PNC could not force people to vote even though it could forcefully seize for itself any votes exercised by the people. (Author's emphasis) It is for this reason that the WPA in its publication of December 1-15 (Dayclean - Vol. V, No. 10) ended with the exhortation: "Give Burnham a taste of an election boycott. You have tried voting at elections. Each time you have been cheated more than the time before. Try the new weapon of boycott. The old weapons have all failed."

In this posture we were careful to make it known that we were not against elections per se. In fact we are, unreservedly for, free and fair elections. In keeping with an agreement we had signed with all the opposition political parties, before the announcement of the general "elections" we accordingly published what we considered to be the minimum conditions for free and fair elections, namely:

- An independent elections commission
- Repeal of legislation which removed the independence of the elections machinery
- Curtailment of the abuse of proxy voting, postal voting and overseas voting

- Initial counting of the polls at place of polling
- Equal access of all political parties to the media.

These were not forthcoming. Hence the boycott. Despite this, and in opposition to us, the PPP contested the elections. The major reasons advanced for this decision were:

- the opposition should not give up parliament as a forum of struggle
- it was a means of stopping one party rule.

Our response to this reasoning is implicit in the above analysis. To repeat the salient point however: we did not believe a Parliament as corrupt as ours could ever be used as a forum of people's struggle. In effect we stated that we already had one-party rule and that what the regime wanted was a pretended legitimacy. This "pretense of legitimacy" is a product of our traditions of populist politics. It is a necessary feature of the mode of the dictatorship in the context of West Indian politics and the survival of the ideology of the "Westminster" style of politics. (Author's emphasis) The dictatorship does not want to expose its nakedness, so that it can continue to rule not only by operating outside the law and the constitution but also by perpetually creating laws and constitutional precepts to cover its arbitrary and authoritarian character.

The result of the elections are now well known. A team of international observers organised by the Guyana Human Rights Association condemned the elections as the "most blatant fraud" and pointed out that "the worst fears of the Guyanese people regarding the violation of the electoral process have been confirmed." The estimate is that less than 15 percent of the electorate supported the PNC. In the urban areas (Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Mackenzie) the total turnout was less than 15 percent. In the rural areas the voting ranged from 40 to 70 percent -- considerably less than is the normal pattern here, given past experience, which is significantly different from the urban areas. For racial and other reasons, the PPP claims the majority of the rural support.

Despite the differing approaches, the election has nevertheless revealed the corrupt nature of the PNC. Even countries like the USA where a studied indifference to Guyana has been cultivated in the national press, reporting on electoral malpractice and the dictatorship in Guyana has occurred. This hastens the process of international isolation of the regime.

The Shape of Things to Come

What clearly emerges from the above is that the PNC, which seized state power in Guyana with the aid of imperialism, has degenerated into a dictatorship. Because it came to power without popular consent -- either through winning free and fair elections or as a result of popular struggle against the colonial power -- it has been forced to progressively reinforce the exclusion of the masses from real power. This degeneration was, therefore, implicit in the independence settlement which it reached with imperialism. There is, therefore, in its structure and relations to the masses of Guyana, no possibility of a democratisation of state forms in the hands of the PNC. As a dictatorship it has used its control over the economy, the media, the judiciary, the work process, the electoral process and, last but not least, its massive militarisation of the society as the main mechanisms for suppressing the democratic rights of the people. It has done this behind the "pretense of constitutionality," i.e., manipulating the law and the constitution to "legalize" its repression of democratic rights. In this situation the PNC confronts the opposition with the fact that all the "legal and constitutional avenues" (as defined by the PNC) to a change in government has been blocked. From this standpoint all talk of a national front embracing the PNC, is both politically incorrect and futile. The reason being that the PNC is itself an expression of the problem and therefore cannot by its very nature pre-empt or participate in a solution to our national crisis.

It is also clear from the analysis that a political solution is the first prerequisite to resolving the crisis. A political solution, however, while being a necessary first step cannot be sufficient in itself to resolve the entire crisis. It is no doubt in recognition of this and also in recognition of the fact that the crisis is so national that no one party can solve it, that the WPA has called for a Government of National Unity and Reconstruction as a necessary step in the direction of resolving the crisis. Such a government would have as its main task creating a system of participation so that all political parties excluded by the PNC from legal and constitutional access to power, as well as all such social groups similarly repressed by the PNC (the church, trade unions, human rights, business, professional and so on) can contribute to a national solution. Such a broad front is not to be seen as a mere "marriage of convenience" but the only historically correct way to deal with a dictatorship. The history of fascism in Europe, and the proto-fascist and other authoritarian regimes of the Third World reveal clearly that a united front of all social groups and strata dominated and repressed by the dictatorship is the necessary political basis from which to struggle to end the dictatorship. To us, such a united front is also a principled front; and the principles on which we are prepared to work with other groups to create such

a front are:

- (1) commitment to a restoration of the national economy;
- (2) commitment to a restoration of the civil liberties and the rule of law;
- (3) commitment to a restoration to trade union members, their rights to strike, free association, free and fair elections to union offices and effective representation by union officers;
- (4) commitment to the removal of arbitrary rule and corruption in public life;
- (5) commitment to the abolition of private armed bodies and an end to the partisanship of the security forces; and
- (6) commitment to a restoration of rapid establishment of the conditions for free and fair elections, so that the will of the electorate prevails.

Such a democratic transformation of the state and political relations in Guyana is seen as a necessary precondition towards building an alternative social system. To us a socialism that is not democratic in content as well as form is not socialism at all. The historical task of socialism in Guyana is to build on the workers' gains, not to reverse them. To us, the right to strike, to publish, to assemble, to hold free and fair elections are not gifts from the colonial state; these were all won by the masses in the struggle against colonialism. With the formal independence, the petty bourgeois strata which inherited the colonial state have repressed these rights under the guise of various slogans such as "cooperative socialism" and "party paramountcy." In the process it has implicitly and explicitly argued that the loss of democratic rights is necessary to build the country! To us the loss of these rights is necessary only to maintain the PNC in power. The task of socialism is to expand on these democratic rights both in terms of the relations of people to politics, the state and the law and in their socio-economic relations as well.

The consequence of all this is that the immediate and urgent struggles before us take place within the context of the democratic phase of the Guyanese resolution. Without the expansion of human rights, the workers and peasants cannot organize. Without an expansion of human rights the formerly colonized and dispossessed also cannot organize. And without mass organisation, without mass involvement, without mass participation, without the leadership of the working class and the peasantry, in other words, without the vast majority of the people a new society can-

not be built. That is why the WPA's slogan has always linked bread, justice and the end of the dictatorship to people's power. To us it is the same regime, the same social source from which the economy has been destroyed that human rights have also been destroyed, the society became militarized and state violence and political murder have been made routine ways of life.

In the final analysis, history is on the side of the masses and of the majority. The fact that, in spite of all the state violence and all the terror, the people continue to be united across racial boundaries and around the project of their liberation, is living testimony to this. In pursuit of that project, Walter Rodney has paid the supreme sacrifice, we dedicate our commitment. He would say: "We have a history to make and a responsibility to all humanity to make our people's history." With this we call upon all who support justice, the poor, the dispossessed and the exploited majority to rally around our cause and to help us pursue the internal and external isolation of the dictatorship. Without allies, and without the indifference of the bourgeois press the dictatorship cannot stand.

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