

Jagan spoke the truth about poverty and sought to end it

By [Ralph Ramkarran](#) December 12, 2021

On Wednesday December 8, SN published two letters by Professor Tarron Khemraj and Dr Baytoram Ramharack with the following headlines: “We cannot fully explore US strategy towards Jagan without considering how deep Jagan was embedded in the Soviet orbit” and “Soviet style Marxism-Leninism became like a religious conviction for Jagan and led to catastrophic repercussions for the country.” Although many readers may have now become bored by this discussion, the headlines, which reflect the contents of the letters, do not tell the full stories behind US intervention in Guyana and in many other countries during the Cold War era.

Jagan was influenced by Marxism since the 1940s but resisted the accusation of being a communist because the PPP was not a communist party. Strictly speaking, a person influenced by Marxism is not necessarily a communist, although they were derogatorily referred to as ‘fellow travellers.’ Walter Rodney was a prime example. It was not until 1977, with a new constitution, that the PPP officially adopted Marxism-Leninism. While the character of the leadership of the PPP was never in any doubt, it was its progressive and anti-imperialist posture and mass following, albeit ethnically based, together with the US’s irrational fears, that were the fundamental reasons for the hostility of the US.

Even if Dr Jagan did not make the choices that he did, would Burnham have allowed the PPP, with an ethnically ascendant Indian following knocking on the doors of the public service and professions, to hold office in perpetuity? Would D’Aguiar have allowed a growing, pro-PPP, section of the Indian business class, to continue to challenge the commercial grip of Portuguese business? With the US off Guyana’s back, would not these and other imponderables have been too many to envisage the calm and productive era of Indian dominance that Dr. Ramharack craved? And how does Dr. Ramharack fit into his equation the accusation against the Marxist-Leninist, communist, Dr. Jagan, made since his 1956 Congress Speech, that he was also an Indian racist intent on securing Indian domination and African marginalisation?

Mohammad Mosaddegh was the Prime Minister of Iran between 1951 and 1953. Far from being a communist, he sought to limit the control of the British owned Anglo-Iranian Company and when it resisted, parliament decided to nationalize the company. Great Britain and the US decided to overthrow the Government. The CIA’s involvement has been fully admitted. The Shah of Iran was installed and established a pro-US, one party, dictatorship which lasted until 1979, supported by a large secret service, SAVAK, that tortured and killed thousands.

Jacobo Árbenz was a military officer and in 1944 he led a rebellion against repressive rule. Árbenz succeeded Jose Arevalo, a progressive, in 1951. He expanded social and democratic reforms and implemented agrarian reform under which uncultivated portions of large land holdings were nationalized with compensation and distributed to landless peasants. His policies were opposed by the US Fruit Company, which lobbied the US Government to have him overthrown, which eventually occurred. The coup of 1954 led to military rule and was the origin of the civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996 in which over 200,000 persons died, mainly Mayan Indians, and perpetrated mainly by US aligned and trained military forces. Árbenz declared that he was building a capitalist society, but he was decidedly on the side of progressive forces.

Patrice Lumumba, the Prime Minister of Congo, was overthrown and assassinated in 1960 after he turned to the Soviet Union for help when the US and United Nations refused his request after a rebellion in the armed forces shortly after Congo gained independence. Help was refused after his African nationalist and Pan-African sympathies were mistaken by the US for pro-communist leanings, which he denied. Both the US and Belgian governments had plotted against him. Mobutu eventually took power in 1965 with US support and remained in office dictatorially up to 1997. He jailed opponents, plundered the country and maintained the people in poverty.

Finally, Salvador Allende, like all the above leaders, was a non-communist, progressive, leader who was elected as the President of Chile in 1970 and overthrown in 1973 in a CIA assisted military coup. Augusto Pinochet and the Chilean military governed Chile from 1973 to 1990, killing over 3,000 people, jailing thousands and exiling many more thousands.

US intervention from the 1950s to the 1980s was designed to remove democratic, progressive, leaders, seeking economic, political and social reforms, and to maintain pro-US dictators in office in a misguided, decades-long, anti-democratic crusade to protect US interests, which resulted in death, destruction and poverty in many parts of the world, including Guyana. Jagan had no relations with the Soviet Union in the critically relevant years of 1953 and 1962, and in between. The assertions of Professor Khemraj and Dr Ramharack are therefore only relevant long after the die was cast. The economic policies of Jagan’s governments up to 1964 were not opposed to US interests. They were pro-business and sought to grow the economy and alleviate poverty. Jagan offered Guyana’s neutrality to allay US fears. It was not enough. Like the four leaders above, Jagan was not tolerated, because he spoke the truth about poverty and sought to end it.

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