

Fighting for real independence

HISTORY will remember leader who struggled for social progress among the dis-

possessed and the disadvantaged, who vigorously implanted progressive political thought, who was a resolute builder of political movements; who forged the political-labour nexus; who was an unwavering Caribbean integrationist; who was a true internationalist in his unrelenting promulgation of the New Global Human Order; and whose authentic local legacy has to be his tireless fight for national unity, working class unity, and racial unity.

His ideas and his indefatigable promotion of these ideas have not only redefined the Caribbean, but have impacted the world of the poor. These writings and his grassroots work have a superlative nexus with current philosophical debates, particularly in the philosophy of history and the social and behavioural sciences and with moral and political philosophy.

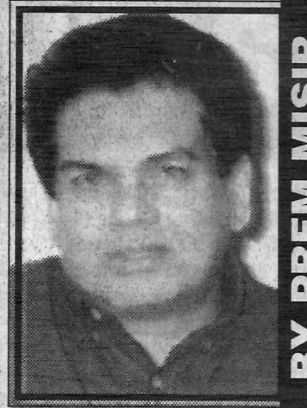
This understanding of history sees economic, social, and political influences of human life as the most important factors shaping human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

The fight against colonial hegemony to achieve Independence, working together for national unity, working class unity, and racial unity, and the promulgation of the New Global Human Order are only a few of the major thrusts of Dr Jagan's work. But today, I want to focus on his fight for Independence. Next week, national unity will occupy centre stage.

The former President of Guyana has been a tenacious fighter for Independence and he is among the first few to have kicked off this struggle against colonial domination. This novel idea of Independence emerged in 1945 in a Dr Jagan pamphlet titled 'COOPERATIVE WAY'. Dr Jagan said: "It therefore behoves the working class people to get control of government through their constitutional ballots in our forthcoming election, with a view towards complete independence. A free and independent Guyana can easily cooperate and eventually federate with her Latin neighbours, especially Brazil."

The PPP birthed in 1950 continued from where the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) left off; unrelenting agitation for Independence became the number one item on the PPP's agenda; demands included universal adult suffrage, a fully elected legislature, a Cabinet of elected Ministers, etc. This feverish campaigning drew the ire of British planters, prompting the arrival of the Waddington Commission. This was a success long in the making for the PPP struggle against colonial hegemony; a struggle that conceived and gave birth to universal adult suffrage; a struggle that designed the road map for Independence. The first election under universal adult suffrage happened in 1953 during the Cold War.

Not long after, the Colonial Office removed the PPP Government after only 133 days in office; the spread of communism in Guyana topped the list of the British and American governments' reasons for the



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Colonial Constitution did not protect fundamental rights, a pre-condition for national unity; (2) the colonialists' marionettes gained power through a rigged constitutional arrangement; (3) detention without trial was still the order of the day; (4) colonialists still exerted political and economic domination via firming up the economy rooted in primary production and extraction, and the escalating debt burdens; (5) the state of emergency was still in place to silence and bully the working class; (6) PPP comrades were still languishing in detention at Sibley Hall.

The British political authorities in an unabashed show of imperialist intrigue with their American counterparts granted Independence in 1966, not because they loved the Guyanese

people, but because of a concerted effort to: keep Dr Jagan and the PPP out of office; consolidate British and American vested interests; demonstrate the virility of the Truman and Lyttleton Doctrine; infuse the 'American way'; and illustrate, unwittingly and unintentionally perhaps, the meaning of political opportunism.

The PPP's election victory in 1992 cemented the way for real Independence, prompting Dr Jagan to proclaim that the people have won and "...that for the first time since independence, we have a Parliament which is truly representative of the people..."

This year marks the 40th Independence anniversary and for the first time in these last few years, a new spirit of Independence has stalked this land; and recapturing the spirit of 1953, national unity, working class unity, and racial unity, may very well require an engaging public discourse and consensus.

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Proper scrutiny of the P Government's Parliamentary measures were all working class based, and not communistic; the removal had a lot to do with American and British vested economic interests, interests quite attuned to the Truman and the Lyttleton Doctrines, advantages of imperial interests; classic beginnings of the British and American Administration's attempts to prevent the PPP's accession to political power.

With considerable resilience and conscious of the odds stacked against it, the PPP forged ahead with its persuasive campaign for political independence; the Colonial Office dumbstruck by the PPP's enthusiastic campaigning, agreed to initiate dialogue, not primarily for negotiating Independence principally for blocking the PPP's return to power; hence the 1960 London Constitution Conference.

The British Government agreed on Independence on two conditions: that both Legislative Houses in Guyana should (1) approve motions for Independence, and (2) grant independence to the West Indies Federation.

The People's National Congress showed little enthusiasm for immediate Independence in 1960. Any way, both conditions were fulfilled. Dr Jagan subsequently met with the Secretary of State for the Colonies Mr Reginald Maudling on December 13, 1961 with a request for Independence by May 31, 1962. Maudling refused. The PPP Premier then proceeded to the UN Fourth Committee in New York seeking to rally support for Independence; the Committee agreed to mull this matter and report back to the UN General Assembly and requested the British to resurrect negotiation on the Independence matter without delay.

Incidentally, only an Independent territory was eligible to make representations on this Committee; Guyana was not yet independent; but the Committee manoeuvred a hearing for Dr Jagan amid strenuous British objections.

In 1962, to further delay Independence, the PNC conditioned the bestowal of Independence with a change in the electoral system. Great Britain eventually granted Independence to Guyana on May 26, 1966.

Vernon Nunes while in detention at Sibley Hall, penned "INDEPENDENCE YES! CELEBRATIONS NO!" a front page caption in Thunder of April 1966. Dr Jagan advanced these reasons for not celebrating Independence: (1)