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WHY PPP RETAINS ITS MASS SUPPORT

(The Text of a Radio Broadcast by Janet Jagan, General Secretary of the PPP)

As General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party I have been asked to speak to you on the contribution which the PPP has made to the development and welfare of this country, what the Party stands for, and in what direction it is heading.

The People's Progressive Party, without a doubt, is the most discussed political party in the Caribbean and has been for the past decade the most notable political organisation in this area. Its activities and policies, the statements of its leaders have all been analysed and misrepresented since the Party was first organised.

Balanced against this harsh criticism and the barrage of hate and slander is the other side of the scale which contains devoted members and supporters who have voted the Party into office in the only two elections we have had under universal adult suffrage.

The question often asked by those who read the biased press reports and who listen to the hysterical utterances of the Opposition is — how is it that the PPP continues to maintain the support which has gained it victory in two major elections?

Of course, the answers most often heard are the ones slandering you — they say you are ignorant, that you know no better; they say the PPP has support only among the uneducated, the PPP fools the people. But how reliable are answers like these? Are the poor ignorant? Are they fools? We do not think so. We know that the strength of the PPP lies in a number of facts and reasons. Let me outline a few of them to you.

First of all, the PPP is the oldest political party facing the elections. As a Party its policy and programme and its leaders are well known. They are tried and tested, and in the test have come out with flying colours.

The policy of the PPP which is today being so much discussed, praised and attacked is nothing new to the members and supporters of the Party who voted us into office in 1953 and again in 1957 on the basis of an election manifesto which had already set out the Party's stand on such issues as independence, land reform and dual control of schools.

Through an intensive programme of political education, the majority of people have well understood the Party's chief aim of achieving independence and the reason for this. Let me read you a portion of our 1953 election manifesto.—

"So long as a country is a colony therefore the problems arising in it will always be solved in a way suitable to imperialism. Only with independence will the establishment of socialism in our country be possible. From which it follows that only political and economic independence from imperialism will create the conditions necessary for really progressive development in any colony."

Another important factor is, of course, that the policy and activities of the PPP come from you, the people, and are not thrust upon you as is the case with recently-formed political parties, which spring up like mushrooms soon after election dates are announced, and die as rapidly after the last vote is counted.

In other words, the people's confidence is built on many things, long association, wholesome and honest dealings with people, the fact that the PPP and its leadership always move among and with the people and is never divorced from their daily life and work. One might say — "delivering the goods", to use a slang.

By this I mean that during the last four years, in spite of working under a colonial constitution and suffering a number of setbacks, the record of achievement is phenomenal. There is no record of any other term of office in British Guiana equal to that of the past four years in terms of positive achievement. Under the guidance of the PPP the country has been put on the map and is at last moving.

On t h e economic level production has increased by leaps and bounds. Last year the total value of the country's production reached the all-time record figure of \$240 million. New markets for our produce have been found.

Exports last year totalled \$120 million — also an all-time record. Cooperative development and the allocation of an additional hundred thousand acres of land have further stimulated a rapidly expanding economy.

This expansion in the economy has benefitted everyone, creating new jobs not only in the country but also in the towns. New investments have entered British Guiana, and massive technical and financial assistance has been obtained. The United Nations is helping us more than it is helping any of the other British Caribbean territories, to give one example.

I cannot, in this broadcast, deal in detail with the many changes and improvements which this country has seen in the last four years, but all of us cannot help realising that there has been a strong injection of new life and vigour, with the result that this country is being pulled out of the mud in which it has been stuck for over a century.

But let me, at this stage, take you back to the origins of the People's Progressive Party, and briefly trace developments from January 1950 when it was born. There were efforts to form political parties before the coming of the PPP, but as we know from history, they were short-lived.

The establishment of a stable, permanent political party was itself one of the greatest contributions which the PPP made to this country. This meant a great change in the concept of politics to the Guianese people. For politics as it had been was the politics of the individual — favours, bribery, neglect of the masses and their divorce from political life after elections.

We know that the politician before the PPP was born was interested in the electorate only at election time. In fact, remnants of that still exist today on the political level, but I predict that this is the last general election at which the old time politics will survive.

The voters used to be the means of leaping into the Legislative Council with all its grand possibilities of personal and economic benefits and social advancement. They were never a means of achieving any particular socially desirable policy. But with the emergence of the PPP, political activity became not a vehicle for personal gain by a few but a means of improving the lot of the many, particularly the poor and under-privileged.

The PPP was not organised to fight any particular election. It was born three years after an election and three years before another. It was formed to mobilize the Guianese people to fight in an organised and methodical way for an end to colonial rule, against oppression, and for popular rights. It patterned its structure after that of known political parties. It wrote a constitution which made certain that the party was democratically run, that the mass of the members would have the highest and ultimate voice in electing its leaders and formulating its policy. This right was vested in its annual conference of members.

The major task of the newly formed PPP was to educate the workers and farmers, to make them aware of the country's problems and the way to fight for a better life and the unification of the people for this struggle. The methods used then were new. They are now so much a part of our life that we somehow take them for granted and forget that much was originated in British Guiana by the PPP.

Public meetings, not just at election time, but systematically up and down the country, week in and week out, were started. The political education of the people of British Guiana began. It was an awakening from a slumber. These were indeed great changes, welcomed by many, hated by those who wanted you to remain quiet, subservient, ignorant and asleep politically.

But perhaps one of the most controversial of the activities of the PPP was its politics of protest, which we know succeeded in forcing a number of urgently needed changes in this country.

British Guiana had from time to time over the years experienced protests of various kinds. We read accounts of the early period of colonisation; when the Berbice slaves revolted in 1763 against inhuman conditions; of the East Coast slave rebellion sparked off by Reverend John Smith; and of the various revolts of sugar workers at Ruimveldt, Leonora and Enmore.

Those were explosions, like spontaneous combustion. They had to happen. They were unplanned, unorganised. They were the inevitable results of terrible and cruel conditions. These were in a sense, protests, but were greater than protests; they were really revolts.

But at no time in British Guiana had any group of people sat down to examine the problems to see how best they could be corrected. This the PPP did. The PPP began a systematic attack on the first evil — colonialism. This organised protest against colonialism and for independence of the country, as we know, has been a successful assault.

Today because of the tenacity and persistence of the PPP we stand on the threshold of independence. We stand there entirely through the efforts of the PPP, and not through those of the weaklings who fell out when the going became too hot and the pressure too painful and who now, when the persecution and hard work are nearly over, start to sing the song of independence.

Independence for British Guiana will not be won by the efforts of the half-hearted, who only today have the courage to mention the word which was once almost taboo in British Guiana. I could name a few who almost once fainted at the thought, and who are now boldly talking about "when independence comes." But let me not trouble you with them now.

This organised protest against colonialism has included many other points of protest which result from the very nature of colonialism. I refer to the walls of privilege which we have been hammering against for over a decade.

One group, one privileged group, has always ruled in this country-ruled with an iron hand the political, economic and social life of the country. This group has fostered godfatherism and favours, it has held back progress, and it has restricted democratic rights. It was against the bastion of privilege, this almost insurmountable fortress, the PPP had to struggle. This, of course, brought forth the total venom of the same privileged clique who controlled the press. What right had the PPP to question who owned the press, to criticise the big sugar interest for piling up profits year in and year out and keeping their workers in bondage? What right had the PPP to suggest a democratic constitution

which would not allow the privileged to continue to control the Legislature and the Executive? What right had the PPP to suggest universal adult suffrage, the giving of votes to the masses? These were the questions which the privileged group asked. And when the PPP won a massive victory in 1953 and swept out the old brigade they immediately used all their influence to nullify the democratic vote of the electorate.

The suspension of the constitution in 1953 will forever be a blot on the British Government which made the mistake of listening to their former advisers who had long lost contact with reality. The Interim Government was a return to power of the privileged classes, with many willing and ready puppets to do the dirty work.

Through the years if the PPP's fight to end the age of privilege, great strides have been made. Paternalism, the handing out of charity to the workers is ending, and through the militant spirit built up by the PPP, workers are no longer begging with cap in hand for their rights; they are demanding their rights. The best jobs in Government and big business are no longer restricted to those of light colour skin as in the days of old. Some who oppose us have benefited from this change but choose conveniently to forget how it came about.

The pressure from the agitation of the PPP has brought about Guianisation in the fields of government service, business and industry. The control of boards and committees is no longer in the hands of the privileged and their friends. Ordinary farmers, workers, school teachers and others today sit on these once exalted seats.

Bad habits acquired by decades of British rule and the imitation of these habits and customs are being changed. Art and culture, formerly almost wholly imitative and the preserve of the privileged few, is shifting to a most distinctive Guianese influence. The sole ambition of most parents has been to educate their children for white collar jobs. Built on a false sense of values created by the misconception that the importee did not do manual work, there is now a battle going on to shift the emphasis in education to the technical, professional and highly skilled which will help build the nation of the future. Through the influence of the PPP, there has been a gradual move away from these old, false values.

Only with the PPP in control of an independent Guiana will the death knell of exploitation, poverty and social injustice be heard.

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The Text of a Radio Talk by The Party General Secretary

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GENERAL SECRETARY JANET JAGAN

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