

(*Thunder*, 14 April 1962)

AN ANSWER TO MR. D'AGUIAR

By Janet Jagan

Mr. D'Aguiar has been trying to excuse the violence which he precipitated in February by saying that we started picketing and demonstrations in British Guiana.

At a meeting he held on Sunday last he is quoted in the *Chronicle* as saying that "in 1951 the PPP picketed and demonstrated against the McDavid budget. Mrs. Jagan had led the demonstration. But the imperialists, said to have been in power then did not proclaim the area. The Governor who was President of the Legislative Council and Mr. McDavid, Financial Secretary, were booed on their way to the Public Buildings.

"He recalled that. Dr. Jagan had said in the Council that what had occurred was a 'symptom of public opinion' against the budget.

Boos

"After the meeting, Mr. D'Aguiar continued, Dr. Jagan was loudly cheered and the Governor and Mr. McDavid were booed when they left the Public Buildings.

"Mr. D'Aguiar referred to the event as similar to what happened last February, the difference being that Dr. Jagan, instead of leaving the front entrance sneaked out through the back door, when the area round the Public Buildings was proclaimed."

Distortions

Mr. D'Aguiar distorts history when he says that the only difference between the 1951 picketing of the Legislative Buildings and the February demonstrations around the Public Buildings was that Dr. Jagan left by the back entrance. Some people have short memories indeed!

The great differences between the picketing and demonstrations which we participated in during 1951 and those of D'Aguiar in February 1962 are these:—

1. The PPP was demonstrating against colonialism and a budget which did not tax the rich. The PPP was demonstrating against continuance of rule by the Big Business interests which were then in control.

In February last, the demonstrations against a popularly and democratically elected government led by Big Business interests who feared to lose their profits, Mr. D'Aguiar being one. The presence of trade unionists and workers did not mean that it was a popular revolt because poor and corrupt leadership carried misguided and misinformed people into the demonstrations.

Also, many of the demonstrators were forced into participation by their employers, who threatened dismissal if they refused. Proof of this is abundant.

It must not be forgotten that the Government in 1951 was not democratically elected, having a suffrage based on ownership of property and income qualifications.

Difference

The Legislature was presided over by the governor and there were elected, nominated and official members sitting in the Council chambers. How different that was to today.

2. The picketing and the demonstrations we engaged in then and all during the years of the PPP were never violent. Our people did not carry weapons, they did not carry stones and bottles and sticks. They did not use stones and bottles and sticks and guns. They did not injure anyone: They did not burn buildings. They did not kill policemen. They did not shout at McDavid and the Governor – “We are going to kill you. We are going to burn you down.”

No, our people had leadership, good, sound leadership. What our people said then and say today is that we will end colonialism. We will end the day of the rich exploiting the poor. We will be independent.

None of the PPP picketing of demonstrations ever got out of hand. Sure, the Governor was booed. But his person was not touched. We don't mind boos. But we do mind when our leader is personally attacked and injured at the Public Buildings.

These, Mr. D'Aguiar are the differences between all the picketing and all the demonstrations in which the PPP (myself included) participated from 1950 to the present. And from all of them there was not one building burned, not one person injured, not one person threatened with loss of life and property.

Tear gas too

I am sure that Mr. D'Aguiar will add this. He will undoubtedly say – But the Government provoked the people by the Proclamation, by the use of tear gas, by the presence of troops. My answer is simple. We had tear gas thrown at us in 1953 and 1954. I was at our Party Headquarters on Regent Street when we were tear-gassed. We didn't then call on our people to rise and attack, burn down Government House and all the business houses.

We had Proclamations then, but they did not incite us to violence. Dr. Jagan broke one of the Proclamations. He went to jail for it, but he did not utilize the opportunity to lead his followers into riots. He could have. Make no mistake about it! But he didn't, because he was and is a responsible leader. We had troops here then. They did not provoke us to burn down buildings and loot. Those things could have been organised if we thought in those directions. But our minds were directed in different paths.

Struggle

We led the struggle by educating the people of the ills of colonialism and the need for unity to end the exploitation of this country by the dominant clique that wanted only power and profits – profits and power. We attained power by the valid ballot and proved our worth by winning in three successive elections – without benefit of a daily press or foreign finances. We did not attempt to grab power by bloodshed.

That, Mr. D'Aguiar, is the difference.