

PARTY LIFE:

Spirit Of Internationalism

— Janet Jagan

Even before the People's Progressive Party was formed in January, 1950, the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), which was established in November, 1946, with the objective of forming a political party, had adopted the principles of Proletarian Internationalism.

PAC extended fraternal support to the struggle in South Africa, to striking British workers and to sugar workers in Cuba fighting for better conditions. Perhaps, its strongest contribution to the principle of internationalism was during the Canadian seamen's strike of the 1940s when their union called a world-wide strike on all Canadian ships manned by union members. Two ships were at the time in Port Georgetown and members immediately joined the strike.

PAC members gave active solidarity, taking care of stranded seamen, arranging legal representation and carrying food to the striking seamen on their ships in the dead of night.

As early as March 24, 1950, the PPP passed a resolution at a public meeting protesting the treatment of Seretse Khama, the then ruler of the Bhamangwato tribe, sending copies of the resolution to the Commonwealth Relations Minister, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Human Rights Committee of the UN and the High Commissioner of Bechuanaland.

At the second Congress of the PPP held in 1952, the Party received greetings from the Council on African Affairs in New York stating that Paul Robeson, Chairman, had extended "warmest fraternal greetings". The letter stated — **"We have followed the work of the People's Progressive Party of British Guiana with great interest and have noted with pleasure your achievements. We wish you continued success in your endeavour and in attaining our common ultimate goal of world freedom and peace"**.

At that Congress it was reported that the PPP sent protests abroad on the issues of the Antigua strike, the Hans Crescent incident and the Du Bois persecution. At that Congress a resolution was passed protesting the intimidation of St. Lucian sugar workers who had been

harassed by a police detachment from Grenada and the presence of the HMS Sparrow in port while the trade dispute was going on. It endorsed the action taken by the Workers Freedom Movement of Trinidad which, at a public meeting on March 18, 1952, had protested the actions against St. Lucian workers.

And at the Third Congress held in 1953, a resolution of sympathy to the people of Czechoslovakia on the death of President Klement Gottwald was passed. At that Congress, greetings were received from the Secretary of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY), the Caribbean Labour Congress and from a veteran Jamaican labour leader — Ferdinand Smith.

In the very early period, before the real beginnings of the world-wide solidarity for the struggle of the Vietnamese people, the PPP was involved in solidarity actions, mainly through association with a Vietnamese comrade who was a political prisoner in Cayene. He escaped to Guyana and moved close to our Party.

So, it can be seen that from the very beginnings of our Party, we had strong international links and had extended solidarity with the struggles of workers in the Caribbean and other parts of the world. It was during this period too, when the struggle of the South African peoples for their rights had not won world-wide attention, that the PPP not only extended solidarity, but raised funds to assist.

The PPP, in its growth and development, did not have an International Secretary and Committee in the early period. Not until the decision to transform the Party into a Marxist-Leninist type party, did the position of International Secretary develop. Then even greater attention was paid to International Affairs.

The main type of international activity has centred around aspects of protest, the peace struggle, work towards friendship with fraternal parties and peoples, exchanges of information and using such information to educate and inform.

International solidarity in the area of protests has included picketing — as in cases such as the threatened invasion of Nicaragua; the invasion of Grenada; the war in Vietnam; vigils for peace; signature campaigns; fund raising (as in the struggle of the Nicaraguan people against the Somoza regime); solidarity with Cuba in the blockade and invasion (Playa Giron); Sanctions against South Africa.

Protest actions have included public meetings, seminars, cables, resolutions, parliamentary motions, use of press and radio and sidewalk posters and photo exhibitions.

Friendship societies have emerged to forge links with different countries, one of the first being the Guyanese-Soviet Friendship Society. These have encouraged greater understanding between Guyanese and peoples living in the socialist and third world and have included friendship societies with the GDR, Cuba and a broader umbrella organisation known as the Council for International Friendship and solidarity with other countries. Language classes, exhibitions of books and photographs, film and video shows, lectures and socials have formed this type of international friendship.

Not only has the Party extended its hand of friendship at the widest possible level, but it has also received very firm and substantial international solidarity. In 1953, after the constitution was suspended, two leading members of the Party, Fred Bowman and Nasrudeen, were charged with treason. A famous British lawyer, D. N. Pritt came to then British Guiana to defend the two comrades and was successful in winning their freedom.

In later years, during the Arnold Rampersaud trial of the '70s, such stalwarts as Grenada's Maurice Bishop and barristers from the USA, England and the Caribbean, came to his defence and after three trials, won his freedom.

The Party extended meaningful solidarity to the Cuban Revolution, particularly in the early period when Cuba was seeking to break imperialism's isolation. The PPP government, even though it had no control at that period of foreign affairs, invited Cuba to open a trade office in Georgetown, and entered into trade arrangements with that country.

During the sixties, when the CIA encouraged and funded the TUC, the PNC and the UF, to overturn the PPP government, the Party received strong solidarity from all quarters. Who will forget the Cuban and Soviet vessels that came into Port Georgetown at great risk from CIA-funded saboteurs, to assist the besieged PPP Government?

The Party and its arms became at an early period associated with international bodies. The Women's Progressive Organisation became affiliated to the Women's International Democratic Federation, attending a Con-

gress in 1953. The Progressive Youth Organisation became associated with the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students. In fact, Cheddi Jagan attended the World Festival of Youth in Berlin 1952.

The Party is associated with the **World Marxist Review** and has a permanent member on its Editorial Council; the President of the Guyana Peace Council, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, sits on the Presidential Committee of the World Peace Council; the Union of Guyanese Journalists is on the Executive Committee of the International Union of Journalists. The Party sends representatives to many international forums. The PPP is a respected member of the International Workers' and Communist Movement.

By the consistent international work of our Party and by the firm expressions of solidarity from peoples of many countries, the Guyanese people have, perhaps more than in any other country of the English-speaking Caribbean, understood the meaning of international solidarity and friendship.

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Union Bashing In USA

According to figures of the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, trade union membership in the United States has diminished by 2.7 million since 1980 to the figure of 17.4 million. In 1984, 18.8 per cent of the entire workforce were unionised, as against 23 per cent in 1981.

These figures are not surprising, pointed out J. Zaluski, economics expert of the trade union centre AFL-CIO, because of the Reagan Administration's tendency to disrupt the organised labour movement in the States. The 'open' war of the White House against the unions broke out in 1981, when President Reagan declared 'illegal' the air-traffic controllers' strike and abolished their union.

(FLASHES).