

The Struggle Against Anti-Communism!

by Janet Jagan

Our experiences in the struggle against anti-communism began some 40 years ago when the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) was formed, which was to be the precursor of the People's Progressive Party (PPP). PAC had, at its formation in 1946 enunciated its aims as that of "establishing a strong, disciplined and enlightened party equipped with the theory of Scientific Socialism". For the very first time in the Crown Colony of British Guiana an organised group would concern itself with this subject of Scientific Socialism.

In the course of the Committee's three years of activities before the emergence of the PPP in 1950 it encountered many problems with the growing wave of anti-communism. The first encounter began in 1947 when general elections were held and two founding members, Cheddi Jagan and Janet Jagan contested. This was the first time that socialist ideas were propagated at public meetings and the rightist forces were perturbed. They hastily organised counter attacks, and quickly put up candidates to fight against "communist agitators".

The earliest coming together of those who set out to fight communism was made up principally of certain leading members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Catholic Church. This grouping was to form the basis, in later years, of such bodies as the Defenders of Freedom and the United Force, all dedicated to the destruction of Communism. But at that time, in the 1940s, the Sword of the Spirit of the Catholic Church took up the cudgels of anti-communism.

The electoral campaign, particularly in the city of Georgetown, focused mainly on the need to prevent communists from winning seats in the Parliament. Priests in cassocks went house to house, preaching the "godlessness" of communists. However, few people understood the issues at the time, as communism and anti-communism were new concepts and people had no experience or had read little on these matters. Cheddi Jagan won a convincing victory in the elections and became the first PAC-PPP

member in Parliament.

In the meantime, the Political Affairs Committee began combatting the anti-communist onslaught through its monthly mimeographed bulletin, organising educational classes and importing large quantities of literature for mass distribution, showing the achievements of socialism, how people lived and worked in socialist countries and nailing many of the lies being propagated. Also, with Cheddi Jagan now in the Legislative Council and tremendously popular as a defender of the working people, more people listened to and respected his views. His open confrontations in Parliament against the strong, conservative big business positions of the upholders of the colonial system were followed closely by workers in particular.

In 1948, there was the large strike of sugar workers lasting 4½ months, which culminated in the killing of 5, who are known and revered today as the Five Enmore Martyrs. Official government and trade union ceremonies are held annually and a coin has been cast in their memory. The Political Affairs Committee, which gave support to the strike was attacked both locally and in the British House of Commons where a representative of the powerful sugar interests accused the PAC of "political agitation organised by communists, fellow travellers and other good-for-nothings who hang about the roads and bridges of the coast". This intensified the anti-communism which continued to grow, particularly in the early fifties after the formation of the People's Progressive Party.

The PPP, in 1950, when it was founded, set out its two main objectives — firstly the winning of independence; then the building of a socialist society. Thus began British Guiana's first independence movement. Having then fought for and won an advanced constitution, the PPP contested the 1953 elections, sweeping the polls, winning 18 out of 24 seats in the House of Assembly. The campaign became a vicious attack on the PPP, with communism a main issue.

In 1952, Lionel Luckhoo, the most vehement of the anti-communists (he was later to become the High Commissioner for Guyana in London for the PNC regime) introduced the Subversive Literature motion in the Legislative Council — to ban a wide range of booklets and periodicals from the country. He succeeded and it was passed after an historic address to the Parliament by Cheddi Jagan lasting 6 hours with thousands of

workers outside the Parliament Buildings to hear him. Luchoo was also at the head of a campaign that had the full support of the media in publishing numerous cartoons and scurrilous anti-communist propaganda against the PPP and particularly aimed at Cheddi Jagan during the 1953 election campaign.

The PPP was in office for 133 days when the British Government, under Prime Minister Winston Churchill, suspended the constitution and landed marines in the country. The British White Paper on the reason for the drastic action said that "Her Majesty's Government has decided that the Constitution of British Guiana must be suspended to prevent Communist subversion of the Government and a dangerous crisis both in public order and economic affairs". The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton had also enunciated his doctrine — "Her Majesty's Government is not prepared to tolerate the setting up of Communist states in the British Empire".

The decision of the British Government, an unusual one and one completely based on false premises, must be seen also in the light of US imperialism's thrust in the hemisphere and its own special persecution of communists within the USA. In 1948, the Organisation of American States (OAS) was established, mainly to consolidate US hegemony in Latin America. By 1952, the OAS passed a resolution against communism, amplifying the Monroe Doctrine. In the USA, 11 members of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party USA, (CPUSA) were indicted under the Smith Act and given heavy sentences. The McCarran Act was introduced in 1950 and the Communist Control Act in 1954, all to fight communism.

The suspension of the Constitution of British Guiana must be seen in this context. As such it is clear that the US Government influenced the British Government to take strong action against the PPP. It was only one year later that the progressive Government of Guatemala was overthrown by US interference. It was also during this period that the Mossadegh government in Iran, which had nationalised the oil industry, was toppled, instigated by the CIA.

It was the intention of the British to destroy the People's Progressive Party and they aimed at a split, by urging the so-called moderates led by the Party Chairman L. F. S. Burnham to take control over the "extremists", the "communists". The Robertson Commission which

came to British Guiana to examine conditions bluntly stated: "We are therefore driven to the conclusion that so long as the PPP retains its present leadership and policies there is no way in which any real measure of responsible government can be restored. . . . the extremist leaders of the PPP and the policies for which they stand are the sole barriers to constitutional progress". Burnham made a bid for a take-over of the Party, this failed, but the Party was split. This also led to strong divisions in the working class, which were exacerbated in the 1960s and are only now being healed.

By 1957, the British Government, which had now succeeded in splitting the PPP by clever manoeuvres, believed it was safe to have elections without the PPP winning. However, contrary to its expectations, and despite manipulations of constituencies directed against the Party, it won in the 1957 elections 9 out of the 14 seats and became again the elected government within the Crown Colony system. The PNC won only 3 seats.

Now, the anti-communist groups revved up their propaganda, distributing massive amounts of literature produced by the United States Information Services, bringing to Guiana US preachers to declare the godlessness of communism, etc. Later the US based Christian Anti-Communism Crusade would launch its attacks in Guyana.

The Party fought these attacks by showing, in concrete terms, that within the limits of its powers, it could improve the conditions of the working people and make substantial advances in health, education, protecting the workers and in improving standards of living, mainly by advancing agricultural development. In all, the PPP made a tremendous success of its four years in government and when the next elections of 1961 came along, did with ease, win again.

However, during this campaign, the anti-communist propaganda was intensified with threats that the PPP would close down all the churches, confiscate people's small properties, cattle, houses, etc. Much of the Party campaigning was to counter these outrageous charges, which had gained some strength, mainly because the churches took such an active part. Special church services were held to pray that the PPP would not win.

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Movement makes use of gossip, slander and lies to attack the PPP, while at the same time claiming to fight for "Food, Work, Freedom". It is clearly a front organisation, heavily funded, and cleverly not coming out in a frontal attack on communism, but doing so by devious means. Another small group calling itself the Guyana Liberal Democratic Party calls for "free enterprise and democracy".

The People's Progressive Party, through the years, has patiently explained in articles, in booklets, at seminars, public meetings, film shows and community meetings what socialism means, helping the masses understand the issues with honesty and forthrightness, and in clear simple language. It has nailed the lies of the anti-communists, exposed their motives, their origins and objectives. This is, of course, an on-going commitment.