

The P.P.P in the Struggle for Independence

(Revised from a booklet published by the P.P.P. in January 1963)

So much has been said about the People's Progressive Party that it is time that the whole story be put forward. The critics who comprise the press, officials, visiting members of parliament, the opposition, the reactionaries, the die hards have all had harsh and frequently untrue things to say about the P.P.P. From the early days of the Argosy and Seal Coon to the present day slander of the United Force, Daily Chronicle, Evening Post and others there has been a steady barrage of hate and lies against the P.P.P. The puzzling thing is why do the masses love the People's Progressive Party, why do they respect and honour and follow its leaders, its policy amidst the hailstorms of hate and abuse?

Perhaps this booklet describing the thirteen years of the P.P.P in British Guiana will explain this phenomena of a vocal and frequently read press carrying out thirteen years of assault on the party, yet in all times, not succeeding in altering the opinions of the majority of Guianese. In fact, during this period the party has won three major elections and can win a fourth whenever they may take place; it has withstood aggression from leading world powers, oppression, loss of liberty, betrayal and sell-outs, arson, looting and rioting. And worst of all the deadly disease of racialism.

BEFORE 1950

Before the P.P.P was formed in January 1950, the embryo of what was to emerge began some four years earlier with the formation of a small group calling itself the Political Affairs Committee (P.A.C) P.A.C began with a small educational periodical, explaining the reasons for certain conditions which existed in the colony, raising a voice against injustices and giving the lead that the end of colonialism and the introduction of socialism would mean an end to many of society's ills.

P.A.C Bulletin set the pace for what was later to develop into THUNDER. It took sides with the South African coloured peoples in their fight against racial prejudices; it disclosed the profits of Bookers and its influence on the economy of the country; it protested against the privileged ruling clique and it studied and examined imperialism and translated this study into simple language for the ordinary man to understand.

Then came the 1947 general elections and a member of the P.A.C, Cheddi Jagan won a seat in the Legislative Council after fighting in an open struggle against one of the leaders of privilege and reaction in British Guiana – John D'Aguiar. That he was able to win on a restricted franchise is indicative of the force of his arguments and the desire of the electorate for change. With the entrance of Cheddi Jagan to the Legislative Council, a new era began, the era of politics of

protest, the politics of exposure. And it was in the Legislative Council that Cheddi Jagan, later to become the leader of the People's Progressive Party began his systematic, heroic and now historical exposures of the ruling group in B.G. and initiated the organized protests which have ultimately brought about the changes we have observed from that date to the present. For the first time workers had a voice and it was an articulate voice which could not be bribed to silence.

A year after the elections came the Enmore massacre, when five sugar workers, striking for union recognition, better working conditions and higher wages were shot dead by the police. This incident brought to the forefront the terrible and unbearable conditions of sugar workers. It exposed their naked exploitation and the resulting Venn Commission which came to investigate eventually led to improvement in conditions, mainly in the field of housing.

The few local politicians were apologists for colonialism and did not have the interest nor the guts to seek a change. It was after fighting a lone battle in the Legislative Council for three years that Dr. Jagan and the PAC were successful in getting a number of interested persons together to form the first permanent party in British Guiana, the People's Progressive Party. So it was in January 1950 that the PPP was born and its official organ Thunder produced its first issue. The aims and programme of the P.P.P. issued in 1950 make interesting reading. It called for the end of colonialism in B.G., constitutional changes and, what was then the primary agitational issue, universal adult suffrage. "First employment opportunities to be given to Guianese" declared the 1950 programme. At that time, calling for an end to colonial rule and the filling of all posts by Guianese was a most radical and far reaching demand. How far we have traveled since then!

The 1950 programme called for local government reform, adult suffrage and wholly elected councils. Land reform, land settlement, the removal of dual control, the training of teachers, the establishment of secondary and minor industries, more emphasis on preventive medicine, unrestricted freedom of speech, press, radio and assembly and our stand on Federation were all enunciated.

The establishment of a stable, permanent political party was itself one of the greatest contributions which the P.P.P made to this country. This meant a great change in the concept of politics to the Guianese people. For politics as it had been known was the politics of the individual -favours, rum and money passing at election time, bribery and the divorce of the masses from this political life AFTER elections. For we know that the politician before the P.P.P. was born, was interested in the electorate only at election time. The electorate was a means of leaping into the Legislative Council with all its grand possibilities of personal, economic benefits and social advancements. It was not a means of achieving any particular policy unless it was like John D'Aguiar, an opportunity to further the interest his class.

In the past and even today, political parties were formed merely for the purpose of fighting the elections. There was a Labour Party formed in 1947, which soon died after a few months. We had the U.D.P., N.L.F., the N.D.P., the Guiana Independence Movement, all destined to short lives.

The P.P.P. was not organized to fight any elections. It was born three years after an election and three years before another. It was formed to organize the Guianese people to fight, in an

organized and methodical way for an end to colonial rule, against oppression and for the people's 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 members would have the highest and ultimate voice in electing its leaders and in formulating its policy. This right was vested in its annual conference of members which is commonly referred to as the Annual Congress. Its structure included officers and members of a General Council to carry out party policy in between sessions of congress and a similar Executive Committee selected from General Council to handle the day to day affairs of the party.

FIGHTING AGAINST COLONIALISM

One of the recognized methods of fighting for what is needed or what is right and against what is wrong is organized protest. British Guiana had from time to time over the years experienced protests of various kinds. We read in accounts of the early periods of colonization that the Berbice slaves revolted in 1761 against inhuman conditions, of the East Coast slave rebellion sparked off by Rev. John Smith, and of the various revolts of sugar workers at Ruimveldt, Leonora and Enmore. These were explosions like spontaneous combustion. They had to happen. They were unplanned, unorganized. They were 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 and see how best they could be corrected. This is what the P.P.P. did.

Realizing that British Guiana was a colony and that reforms, and changes could not be introduced in the normal democratic way through the Legislature and the Executive, with wholly elected councils and universal adult suffrage- the P.P.P did what political parties and trade unions have done all over the world. It began a systematic barrage of attacks on the first ill-colonialism. It was a planned and concentrated attack. The organization of this has been going on since the party began in 1950 and might be likened to the army of the people against the enemy. Colonialism. This fight, this struggle has been waged ceaselessly for 13 years and has taken the form of demonstrations, picketing, protests at public meetings, in Thunder in booklets, in lectures, until today, the battle is almost won.

This organized protest against colonialism had included many other points of protest, which actually come within the scope of the first and major ills of Guiana's society, colonialism. Within the context of colonialism is that of 'privilege'- the privilege and the rights of one group to rule, to reap the fruits of the country's wealth, to hold back progress, to hold back democratic rights.

It was this bastion of privilege, this almost insurmountable fortress that became the pivot of the P.P.P's attacks and organized protest. This, of course, brought forth the total venom of the same privileged clique, who controlled the press. What right had the P.P.P to question who owned the press, to criticize the big sugar interests for piling up profits, holding in their pockets almost 200,000 acres of the country's lands, exploiting its workers? What right had the P.P.P. to

suggest a constitutional arrangement which did not allow them to control the Legislative and Executive Councils of the country? These were their questions, questions by a group whose position of power in the social, political and economic world of British Guiana had never before been challenged. If in all cases they were not the apparent rulers of B.G., they were the virtual and real rulers. Like a puppet show they held and manipulated the strings of the puppets which danced before the people. Many times the puppets were dark skinned puppets- Indians, Negroes and Chinese-so that the people might be fooled that their own were there, lending a sympathetic and helping hand. And so, some non-whites joined the privileged clique, to strengthen it and prevent attack from the oppressed masses.

ENDING AGE OF PRIVILEGE

Through the years of the P.P.P.'s fight to end the age of privilege and the privileged few in B.G., great strides have been made. Paternalism, the handing of charity to workers is ending and through the militant spirit built by the P.P.P., workers are no longer begging, with cap in hand for their rights; they are demanding their rights. The best jobs in government and industry are no longer restricted to those of white or light skins. The pressure from agitation of the P.P.P. has brought about Guianisation in the fields of government services, 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 etc., today sit in these once exalted seats. Today in the legislature of the country, the majority are representatives of the common man, the minority- of the once privileged clique. Of course, they still have their lackeys and puppets to do their bidding, but these are being exposed and understood more clearly every day for what they are. King Sugar and Big Business no longer control the decisions of the government. Their mouthpieces in the government, the McDavids and the Ramphals are going. In their places, gradually, there is being built a government service of patriots, interested in serving their country, their people.

Bad habits acquired by decades of British rule and the imitation of these habits and customs and alien people are being changed. Art and culture, formerly almost wholly imitative and highly influenced by Britain is gradually shifting to a more distinctive and 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 on the misconception that the white man did not do any manual work, there is now a battle going on to shift the emphasis in education to technical, professional and highly skilled jobs which will help build the nation of the future.

Through the influences of the P.P.P, there has been a gradual move away from these old, false values. In the field of agriculture, for instance, the influence and policy of the P.P.P. has lifted farming from a once scorned field of labour into a now highly prized field, where mechanization and specialization are being encouraged.

These are achievements of the People's Progressive Party- these subtle and fundamental changes which have and are taking place. It is true that they would have had to take place eventually, for such changes are inevitable; but it is certain that they could not have taken place in such a short period of time if the P.P.P. had not been there organizing, leading and consolidating the forces of the people to surmount these fortresses.

Thus, in spite of what our detractors and enemies may say the P.P.P has used the politics of protest to help the country to focus world attention on the problems of the country and to force those in power to bring out needed changes.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

The demands of the People's Progressive Party for democratic government in British Guiana were eventually heard throughout the length and breadth of the country as well as abroad. Questions were asked in the House of Commons, comments were made in the world press. The people's voices were being heard and eventually, results of these demands were forthcoming. The Waddington Constitutional Commission was appointed to examine and propose constitutional changes for B.G.

The demands of the P.P.P. were clear and far-reaching – universal adult suffrage, wholly elected single-chamber legislative council, reduction of the Governor's powers, cabinet system built after the British pattern. These demands greeted the Commission at the Park Hotel when it arrived in Georgetown. Like several commissions that have been in B.G. , there were those who spoke for the 'old guard' and warned against any forward constitutional steps. The old cry, which we still hear today – “the people are not ripe for self-government or independence” was sung to the Waddington Commission. According to some, the people will never be ripe to rule themselves because it is not in their interests that they be.

The P.P.P. gave evidence before the Commission in late 1951 and submitted a memorandum. We know the results of the Commission's visit. The 1953 Constitution introduced at long last, universal adult suffrage. Instead of a single chamber legislature, an upper and lower house were recommended, the upper house to be a check, a brake, on the lower house, which was fully elected. The Executive was made up of six elected- three officials, one nominated member from the upper house and the Governor retained his powers to veto and certification.

While to some extent this constitution did not meet the full demands of the P.P.P. it was a result of these demands that B.G. got a constitution far more advanced than was anticipated by many. In fact in the West Indies, it went further than the constitutions of many of the island territories.

Incidentally the constitution-makers while recommending an "advanced" constitution, accepted as a premise, that the Party system would not be so developed as to permit one party to win an overwhelming majority at the polls. In other words no one party would control the six elected ministers. Thus, though the constitution was advanced, effective power and control would still be in the hands of the Governor. However, in the 1953 election the Party came out victorious, winning 18 of the 24 seats, and upset the constitutional apple-cart.

It was this victory referred to earlier, which terrified the privileged clique of the country, for with this victory began the age of the people's government in Guiana. The former ruling clique saw the handwriting on the wall and feared that their days of influence were over. This end of their rule they maliciously interpreted as an end of their life and possessions, and thus tried to create an hysteria that the P.P.P. would destroy religion and churches, that it would burn and confiscate their property, etc, etc. We saw a repeat performance of this hysteria after we won the 1961 elections.

Of course we know that these were all lies, lies created to fool Guianese and many abroad. They could fool only a few silly persons in B.G., because the majority was aware that the Party had no sinister intentions – in fact, the whole reason for being, for the P.P.P. was to lift the living standards of the many and this could not be done by destroying.

The sordid story of 1953 need not be repeated here. Dr. Cheddi Jagan expressed it fully and clearly in his book "Forbidden Freedom," published in five languages and reprinted three times. In Ashton Chase's booklet "133 Days towards Freedom" we see enumerated the many beginnings to the so greatly needed improvements in B.G. In all of the 4 ½ months the P.P.P. was in office in 1953, every minute was spent in trying to shake off the vestiges and ills of colonialism and to improve the conditions of the masses.

1953 AND AFTER

What happened on October 9th, 1953, is now history and a shameful blot in the history books for Great Britain led by the nose down the garden path of lies and false information. Although the Colonial Office has never officially admitted its gross and embarrassing mistake in 1953, it is common knowledge that they were ill advised by persons highly placed in B.G., and that Governor Savage, new at the job and inexperienced, showed great lack of judgment and mis-advised the Colonial Office into taking the step of suspending the Constitution.

The years 1953 to 1957 were not easy years for the P.P.P. nor for the people of B.G. These were the years when the people saw the full effects of dictatorial rule and the denial of all civil liberties. The country was ruled by the Governor and his nominated Legislators, hand-picked for the occasion. Meetings, assemblies and demonstrations were prohibited, persons were detained for months without trial, houses were raided by the police, books were banned, party members were restricted to districts. B.G. was virtually a Police State.

It was a hard time for many. It was the time of victimization – many workers who stood by the P.P.P. lost their jobs, were given trespass notices by the sugar estates. It was a hard time for the Party, for the difficult times broke down the strength of some, wore away the loyalty of others and eventually led to the split in the P.P.P. and the gross betrayal by Burnham, Latchmarsingh, Jai Narine Singh and others. The remarkable thing about the whole period of 1953 to 1957 is that the Party held together and those who believed in the P.P.P. and what it stood for came out victorious. Those four years were a lesson to Guianese and it revealed to all the undaunted and courageous spirit of the P.P.P. Again, one of the outstanding contributions which the P.P.P. has given to the people of B.G. is the tradition of courage, loyalty and perseverance which it established during these four hard years. In fact, looking back, it can be seen, that this harsh period of the struggle strengthened and built the Party really stronger than it had been before. It showed up weaknesses; it gave Party leaders more understanding of the necessity for self criticism.

On the negative side these four years brought B.G. back to where it was before 1950, when racialism was rampant. The split engineered by Burnham and his clique, succeeded in a reversal of the process of bringing about cohesion of the racial groups. It meant that the P.P.P. has had to fight harder and harder to combat racialism, one of the most deadly cancers facing our society today. For that, we can thank the opportunism of some former members of the P.P.P.

THE 1957 ELECTIONS

Again those in power misjudged. They felt that the four years in the wilderness had completely destroyed the power of the PPP. They believed that the national bribery of the Interim Government, the house building, the Development Scheme, etc, had completely won over the people. They felt that the years of restricting party leaders to the narrow confines of the city and preventing their moving about, holding meetings, etc, had made them lose influence and support. So, in 1957, the Governor announced that there would be general elections and the so-called Renison Constitution was introduced.

The campaign began. The Burnhamites continued to call themselves the PPP, and so, much to the delight of the ruling clique, it seemed that the two sections of the PPP would be engaged in self destruction and the National Labour Front, darlings and spokesmen of the privileged group, would win. Then there would be no more problems in B.G. and life would continue as it had during the past 150 years, with exploitation unchallenged and no subversive talk of independence would be allowed. That was their plan, their hope. They were confident that the National Labour Front would win. They entered into the same frenzy, hysteria and lies of 1953. The newspapers informed us that the PPP (Jaganite) would win a maximum of two seats.

We know the results of the elections. The conservative party, the NLF was completely defeated and its one winning candidate really won on his own merits, and not on the Party's backing. In spite of the well laid plans of the constituency boundaries being mainly against the PPP, the Party was successful even in surmounting this obstacle, the jerrymandering of the constituencies.

The elections revealed two main results of the 8 years' struggle of the PPP – one, that the PPP maintained the confidence and support of the majority of Guianese people and that the electorate agreed to its policy; and two, that the education of the masses had been successful.

Another important result of the elections was that it proved the people understood at last the concept of a political party and the necessity for one party to win sufficient seats to command a majority and thus form a government. This understanding assured a confident majority to the PPP and with this final test, the day of independent candidates in B.G. was finished.

We can only here deal with the general achievements of the four-year term of office of the People's Progressive Party. The full details of this period would take more than a booklet of this size.

The major task of the PPP was to gain for the country its full independent status. In this direction the Party had devoted much of its energies, time and thought. The question was debated in the Legislative Council, a Constitutional Commission made up of the whole Legislature was appointed and in this group the major battle took place. The basic difference between the PPP and the P.N.C. came to the front and it was then revealed that the P.N.C. was not anxious that B.G. acquire independent status. The P.N.C., in favour of immediately joining the Federation, was of the opinion that the independent status would be an obstacle in the way of joining the Federation. Thus, the PNC took a line advocating 'Self Government, not Independence'.

This reversal of the PNC's former stand on the issue greatly weakened the advocacy for independence, and when the B.G. delegation went to London for constitutional talks with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, this division was exploited to the fullest. The old adage of 'divide and rule' was again applied and the bid for immediate independence by the P.P.P. failed because of the changed policy of the P.N.C. It was only the persistence of the P.P.P. delegates which wrestled from the Colonial Office the acceptance of the principle of independence for B.G. and the agreement that two years after the independence of the West Indies Federation, talks would open in London for the final stage to independence.

The Guianisation of the civil service made great strides during the PPP 1957 – 61 term of office. The majority of departmental heads are now Guianese and while the ministers do not have the power to select personnel, their influence in urging that Guianese be selected to posts has been felt. Today the important departments of Agriculture, Drainage and Irrigation, Medical Services, Education, Forestry are directed by Guianese. This attitude of the PPP is also felt in other aspects of Guianese life, in the selection and appointments to boards and committees and in the emphasis placed on these things Guianese. History and Culture Week is a good example. The Party Chairman gave the impetus to this concept of devoting special attention of the

country's history and culture. History and culture week has already become a very important part of the life of the community.

1961 ELECTIONS

Despite the gerrymandering of seats by the Hallet Boundary Commission the PPP for the third time came out victorious in the August 1961 elections. The party won 20 of the 35 seats, a positive majority. The 1961 election campaign was not an easy one- violence was used by opposition parties to break up PPP meetings. The press was violently and viciously opposed to the PPP. The Christian Anti-Communist League of Dr. Schwartz came to the aid of the United Force and spent thousands of U.S dollars in an effort to defeat the PPP. The PNC was so certain of its victory that it displayed pictures of its candidates at its headquarters with the sign. "This is the next Government". The day before elections the PNC conducted a victory broom parade in Georgetown.

THE PLOT AGAINST P.P.P

Both parties were greatly disgruntled at the election results, and began to plot against the PPP. The disappointed supporters of the PNC were re-vitalized by the six petitions brought by their party. This ultimate failure was again built into a hope of success by the United Force's efforts to overthrow the Government in February 1962 to which the PNC gave active support.

The United Force campaigning against independence grasped at the 1962 austerity budget as a means of defeating independence for B.G. We all know only too well the events leading up to Black Friday when unpatriotic and fascist leadership culminated in the shooting, looting and arson, unprecedented in the history of the country.

The D'Aguiar- controlled Daily Chronicle worked itself to a pitch of frenzy and hatred with the lies and distortions it printed.

Hysteria gained prominence over clear thinking. All those who fought against the PPP in the August elections, including many of the corrupt trade union leaders, pitched in to defeat the P.P.P by force, since they had failed by democratic elections. There can be no doubt that the budget was merely a pretext for the shameful happenings of Black Friday week; the chief motivation was to overthrow the PPP.

The fascist policy of the United Force became clear. Destined to be forever a minority political group, the United Force realised that it could not gain power by democratic elections, for democracy means rule by the majority. Fascists represent minority interests and in the changing

world, no longer can capitalists and exploiting interests win elections. So they must resort to other means to regain their rapidly dwindling control.

The fact that the fascist United Force could use the PNC support and its unscrupulous plans is evidence of the weakness and vacillation of their Party's leadership. It will go forever to its shame that the PNC followers did the "dirty work" for the United Force.

The victory of the PPP at the 1961 elections was a clear mandate for independence. The Party Leader, in December 1961, asked the Colonial Secretary to fix a date for the Independence talks. Because of the refusal to fix a date, Dr. Jagan immediately brought the issue to the United Nations, being the first colonial leader in office to speak before that international forum.

Pressure brought by world opinion, forced the U.K. Government to fix a date for May 1962. Following the February riots, the U.K Government postponed the talks, this time to July 16th, Again, in July, the Colonial Office began its delaying tactics and gave a vague promise of a date in September.

The PPP objected to this vigorously, and began a series of protests in the form of picketing Government House, a women's march and mass rallies all over the country.

The Party Leader, Dr. Jagan for the second time, went to the United Nations and addressed the Committee of Seventeen where his request that the matter be raised before the U.N. Assembly was accepted.

The issue before us now is "immediate" independence. And behind us in this struggle are the majority of Guyanese people and millions throughout the world, who want to see a total end to all Colonialism.

The object to this booklet has been to give a general picture of the People's Progressive Party from its inception in 1950 to the present date. It has attempted to show what the Party had stood for and what it has done during this period. It has been possible to devote only a few pages to the period 1957-1961 and the February riots, the details of which could fill a book.

It cannot be denied that the People's Progressive Party has brought the many changes which have been noted in this booklet. The public awareness and interest in the political life of the country is a product of the constant educational work of the PPP. The standard of the political life of the country and the performance of the PPP have been a shining example, not only here, but throughout the Caribbean. The refusal of the PPP and its leaders to become stooges of imperialism, sell-outs to colonialism of which we have so many examples in the Caribbean and elsewhere, has been the reward for the militancy of the movement. When the crisis came, as it does inevitably to every colonial movement, the Party was not broken; its fighting spirit was not diminished.

The powers that have held back progress for over a century are being defeated. The final battle in the present struggle for Independence will not be their last bid for power in this country.

After Independence, the problem of economic emancipation will be the next challenge to the PPP. We are confident that our dynamic policies will win and solve this problem.

by Janet Jagan

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