

**The Cold War In British Guiana, 1953-1966:  
A Case Study of Anglo-American Cooperation**

## Abstract

This thesis looks at how the cold war impacted on a small colony, British Guiana, between 1953 and 1966. The period was the height of the cold war. A local Marxist nationalist leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, had started the country's first political party and was agitating for independence. He won the legislative elections in 1953 under a Constitution providing for internal self-government and governed for 133 days before being removed from office for allegedly wanting to make British Guiana a communist state.

The question arose: was he a communist leader aligned to Moscow or a left-wing patriot wanting to pursue a socialist course. What was the evidence that led to his removal as a Communist? How did the British and American Governments deal with the situation. How did they cooperate in dealing with it?

Cheddi Jagan would subsequently win elections until 1964 when, although obtaining the highest number of seats in the legislature under a system of proportional representation introduced at the insistence of the USA, he would not be given an opportunity to form a government. He was effectively removed from power at the insistence of the USA and it would take twenty-eight years, until after the Cold War had ended, for him to win another election.

The archival evidence indicates significant Anglo-American cooperation in keeping Jagan out of power because of his Marxist inclinations. Materials in the British and American national archives, and in the libraries of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, show significant Anglo-American cooperation in the areas of diplomatic relations, economic cooperation, intelligence-sharing, trades unions relations, debates in international organisations, and civil interactions.

Materials examined at the George Meany Memorial Archives, and not hitherto written about, show the extent to which the AFL/CIO was active on the ground during periods of severe internal unrest in the 1960s, and show local leaders in their pay. American leaders have acknowledged the role of the C.I.A. in the country at this time but the C.I.A. papers have

reportedly been destroyed. However, the papers examined at the George Meany Memorial Archives are vivid on the role of foreign operatives in British Guiana at this time.

This thesis is the first to have looked at Anglo-American cooperation in containing an alleged communist threat in British Guiana.

## Acknowledgements

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I should like to thank the staff of the following Libraries who helped me in my research for original materials: The Guyana National Archives; The Cheddi Jagan Research Center, Guyana; The Library of the University of Guyana; The Public Record Office, London; The US National Archives, Washington, D.C.; The Truman Library, Independence, Missouri; The Dwight Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas; The John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts; The Lyndon Johnson Library, Austin, Texas; The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; The Churchill Library, Cambridge; The British Trades Unions Library, London; The George Meany Memorial Archives, Washington, D.C. and The Critchlow Trade Union Library, Guyana.

I should like to thank, as well, a number of persons who have granted me interviews or have answered written questions I submitted to them, among these I would particularly wish to thank Mr. Richard Hart, a former Jamaican trade union leader for his insights and suggestions; Professor Trevor Munroe of the University of the West Indies and an active trade unionist, for his observations and comments during an interview he accorded me in February 2001 in Kingston, Jamaica; Mrs. Janet Jagan for her comments, and Mike McCormack of the Guyana Human Rights Center, Guyana for his assistance in reading the manuscript and the suggestions he offered.

The Staff of the Library of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies have been helpful to me since the days when I studied at the Institute and they continued to be of great assistance to me during the research for this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my son, Robin and my husband, Bert for their encouragement and moral support throughout this period.

## **Abbreviations**

<b>AFL-CIO</b>	<b>American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations</b>
<b>BGTUC</b>	<b>British Guiana Trades Union Congress</b>
<b>BGEA</b>	<b>British Guiana East Indian Association</b>
<b>BTUC</b>	<b>British Trades Union Congress</b>
<b>BWI</b>	<b>British West Indies</b>
<b>CCC</b>	<b>Caribbean Congress of Labour</b>
<b>CDC</b>	<b>Colonial Development Corporation</b>
<b>CIA</b>	<b>Central Intelligence Agency</b>
<b>CLC</b>	<b>Caribbean Labour Congress</b>
<b>CTAL</b>	<b>Confederation de Trabajadores de America Latina</b>
<b>DLF</b>	<b>Development Loan Fund</b>
<b>FRUS</b>	<b>Foreign Relations of the United States</b>
<b>GAWU</b>	<b>Guiana Agricultural Workers' Union</b>
<b>GGO</b>	<b>Girls' Guide Organisation</b>
<b>GIWU</b>	<b>Guiana Industrial Workers' Union</b>
<b>IBRD</b>	<b>International Bank for Reconstruction and Development</b>
<b>ICFTU</b>	<b>International Confederation of Free Trade Unions</b>
<b>IMF</b>	<b>International Monetary Fund</b>
<b>MPCA</b>	<b>Manpower Citizen's Association</b>
<b>NSC</b>	<b>National Security Council</b>
<b>PAC</b>	<b>Political Affairs Committee</b>
<b>PPP</b>	<b>Peoples' Progressive Party</b>
<b>PNC</b>	<b>Peoples' National Congress</b>
<b>RDC</b>	<b>Rice Development Corporation</b>
<b>RPA</b>	<b>Rice Producers Association</b>

TUC	Trade Union Council
UF	United Force
USIA	United States Information Agency
USIS	United States Information Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation
WPEO	Women's Political and Economic Organisation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

## Biographical Sketches

### USA Actors

BALL, George	Under-Secretary of State: 1960-1963
BERLE, Adolf	Under-Secretary of State, 1961-1963
DILLON, John	Secretary of Treasury, 1960-1963
DULLES, John Foster	Secretary of State, 1953-1959
EISENHOWER, Dwight	President: 1953-1961
JOHNSON, Lyndon	Vice President, 1961- Nov. 1963 President, Nov. 1963 – 1967
KENNEDY, John F.	President, Jan.1961- Nov. 1963
NIXON, Richard M.	Vice President, Nov. 1953-1960
SCHLESINGER, Arthur	Special Adviser to President John Kennedy
TRUMAN, Harry	President, 1945-1953

### USSR Actors

GROMYKO, Andrei	Foreign Minister, 1957- 1985
KOSYGIN, Alexei N.	Minister of Finance and of Light Industry, 1956-57; Deputy Prime Minister, 1960-64 Prime Minister, 1964
KRUSHCHEV, Nikita	First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, September 1953; Premier, 1958-1964.
MOLOTOV, Vyacheslav	Foreign Minister, 1939-1949 and March 1953- June1956
STALIN, Josef	Prime Minister, May 1941-March 1953

### UK Actors

ATTLEE, Clement	Prime Minister, July 1945-Sept. 1951
BEVIN, Ernest	Foreign Secretary, July 1945- Feb.1951
CHURCHILL, Winston	Prime Minister, Oct. 1951- March 1955
EDEN, Anthony	Prime Minister, April 1955-Dec. 1956 Foreign Secretary, Oct. 1951-March.1955
LLOYD, Selwyn	Foreign Secretary, Dec.1955-June1960
MACMILLAN, Harold	Minister of Defence, Oct. 1954-April 1955 Foreign Secretary, April 1955-Dec.1955 Chancellor of the Exchequer, Dec.1955- Jan.1957 Prime Minister, Jan. 1957-Oct.1963
DOUGLAS-HOME, Sir Alec (formerly Lord Home)	Prime Minister, Oct. 1963-Sept. 1964
WALKER, Patrick Gordon	Foreign Secretary, June 1960-Sept. 1963
WILSON, Harold (Lab.)	Foreign Secretary, Sept. 1964-1968 Prime Minister, Oct. 1964-June 1970

## Secretaries of State for the Colonies

CREECH JONES, Arthur	Oct. 1946 - Feb.1950
GRIFFITHS, James	Feb. 1950 - Oct.1951
LYTTLETON, Oliver	Oct. 1951 - July 1954
LENNOX-BOYD, Alan	July 1954 - Oct.1959
MACLEOD, Iain	Oct. 1959 - Oct. 1961
MAUDLING, Reginald	Oct. 1961 - July 1962
SANDYS, Duncan	July 1962 - Oct. 1963
GREENWOOD, Arthur	Oct. 1964 - Dec.1965

## Colonial Governors : British Guiana

WOOLLEY, Sir Charles	1947-1953
SAVAGE, Sir Alfred	1953-1955
RENISON, Sir Patrick	1955-1959
GREY, Sir Ralph	1959-1964
LUYT, Sir Richard	1964-1966

## British Guiana Leaders

JAGAN, Cheddi	Co-leader of PPP, Jan.1950-1955 Leader of the House and Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Mines, April 1953- Oct. 1953 Leader of PPP, Nov. 1953-1957 Premier, March 1957- Oct. 1964 Leader of PPP, 1964-1992
BURNHAM, Forbes	Co-Leader of PPP, March 1950-1955 Minister of Education, April 1953-Oct 1953 Leader of PNC, April 1957-Aug.1964 Prime Minister of British Guiana, Sept.1964-1966 Prime Minister of Guyana, 1966-1970 Prime Minister of Cooperative Republic, 1970-1980 Executive President, 1980-1982
JAGAN, Janet	Co-founder of PPP, 1950 General Secretary of PPP, 1950-1970 Elected to the House of Assembly, 1953. First woman to become Deputy Speaker of the Legislature. Minister of Labour and Housing, 1957 Minister of Home Affairs 1963-64

## West Indian Leaders

### Barbados

#### Premier

ADAMS, Sir Grantley, 1954-1958
CUMMINGS, Dr. H.G.H., 1958-1961



BARROW, E., 1961-1966

**Jamaica**

Chief Minister      BUSTAMANTE, W. A., 1953-1955  
                              MANLEY, Norman, 1955-1959

Premier                MANLEY, Norman, 1959-1962  
Prime Minister        BUSTAMANTE, Sir A., 1962-1967

**Trinidad**

Chief Minister of Finance      WILLIAMS, Eric; 1956-1961  
Premier                              WILLIAMS, Eric; 1961-1962  
Prime Minister                      WILLIAMS, Eric; 1962-1981

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## Introduction

This introduction aims to provide a brief outline of the Cold War struggle in British Guiana between 1953 and 1966, touch on the significance of the case study of British Guiana, indicate the scope of the thesis and review the literature on the Cold War generally with particular reference to British Guiana.

As the Second World War was fought nationalist leaders in different parts of the colonial empires saw the opportunity for independence. In the colony of British Guiana, in 1943, Cheddi Jagan returned from his studies in the United States with his newly wed bride, Janet, an acknowledged communist in her young days. Along with others they began to agitate for better conditions of life for British Guianese, for equality of treatment for all Guianese, and for political independence.

By the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, the British Imperial Authorities had already been watching Cheddi and Janet Jagan and their fellow activists as potential communist “troublemakers”. Nevertheless, in 1953, the British Government granted the colony a constitution providing for adult suffrage and internal self-government. The rhetoric of Cheddi and Janet Jagan and some of their fellow activists was often bombastic and, in the midst of the election campaign in April 1953, 10 years after Cheddi Jagan’s return to British Guiana, his critics openly accused him and Janet Jagan of being communists. During the campaign one of the strongest trades unions of the day, the Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA), ran a multi-page paid Supplement to the leading newspapers in British Guiana warning of a communist menace by Cheddi Jagan and his party.

Nevertheless, Cheddi Jagan’s party won the elections with a large majority and the PPP formed a Government that lasted for 133 days before they were removed from office and the constitution was suspended. Cheddi Jagan and his supporters argued that they had sought in Government to do what they had promised in their election manifesto, notably to reform the labour



laws, to improve working conditions and to put control of Guiana in the hands of Guianese. The British Government, supported by the United States, accused Cheddi Jagan and his party of wanting to bring communism to British Guiana.

An examination of the newspaper coverage in British Guiana during the PPP's 133 days in office, gives a good picture of the high drama the country was experiencing. The rhetoric of some PPP Ministers was undoubtedly provocative. The PPP Government was clearly trying to wrest control of sugar workers from the MPCA. The PPP Government did support widespread strikes in the sugar estates. Independent members of the Legislative Assembly called upon the Government to make a distinction between governing and trade union activism. While all of this was going on, questions were being asked in the United Kingdom whether British Guiana would become the first Communist State in the British Commonwealth. Questions were also being asked in the United States whether British Guiana would become the first Communist State in South America.<sup>1</sup> When the United States National Security Council (NSC) met under the Chairmanship of President Eisenhower two days before the British suspended the Constitution, CIA Director Allen Dulles delivered a report that British Guiana faced a major communist threat.<sup>2</sup>

Immediately prior to the suspension of the Constitution on 9 October 1953 the British and the Americans concerted their efforts and the Americans undertook to provide diplomatic support in Latin America. The British asked the Americans to provide economic aid to the colony. Thereafter, between 1953 and 1966, the British and the Americans would continue to concert their efforts.

The period between November 1953 and 1960 saw more behind-the-scenes concerns. Cheddi Jagan, in 1957, had been returned to power under an amended Constitution with less power and had governed in a less bombastic and more low-key manner. He won elections again in 1961 and began to agitate once again for independence. By this time the British Government was keen to grant

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 10 September 1953 from the Colonial Office to Governor Savage in which Lloyd noted that the Daily Herald was enquiring about the possibility of British Guiana becoming the first communist state in the Commonwealth and South America. CO / 1131/128,, File: A/101/102/56, 12 Sept 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>2</sup> S. Rabe, "Dulles, Latin America and Cold War Anticommunism", in R. H. IMMERMANN, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. Chapter 6. p. 162.

independence as part of its policy of shedding the empire. However, it was British Guiana's misfortune that Cheddi Jagan's agitation for independence at this time came after the Bay of Pigs fiasco for President Kennedy. He was determined not to let another state in the Western Hemisphere "fall" to communism during his Presidency. The Kennedy Administration, and subsequently the Johnson Administration, insisted on a delay in British Guiana's independence and were determined that British Guiana should not attain independence under Cheddi Jagan. Kennedy had in mind his campaign for re-election in 1964 and, following his assassination, President Johnson also had a similar political interest.

The end result was extensive British-American cooperation in bringing about a system of proportional representation to oust Cheddi Jagan from office. This was achieved in 1964 and British Guiana passed into independence on 26 May 1966. It would, thereafter endure a corrupt political dictatorship until after the Cold War ended when the US could tolerate free elections that saw Cheddi Jagan returned to power in 1992. Successive elections would be massively rigged and the government of Forbes Burnham would apply the doctrine of "the paramountcy of the party". It would be only in 1992, after the end of the Cold War, and under international pressure that democracy would be restored to the country.

In studying British Guiana's experience between 1953 and 1966 a number of questions come to mind:

First, was there really a communist threat in British Guiana, or was it a case of anti-colonialist nationalism at work? Cheddi Jagan was a Marxist nationalist patriot married to a determined communist with formidable organising skills. In an address to the National Press Club in Washington on 15 October 1961, Cheddi Jagan painted a moving picture of his nationalist credentials. At the same time from the outset, the PPP was organised around classical communist lines with 'cells', 'youth groups', 'Women's Groups', 'Peace Committees' and similar structures. We shall assess whether there was a communist threat by examining dispatches from the Governor and the American Consuls and looking at the record presented by Cheddi Jagan himself.

We shall also look at whether Cheddi Jagan chose the side of the Soviet Union in the Cold War battle then raging in the world. Arthur Schlesinger in a note of a conversation with Iain MacLeod and Reginald Maulding on 27 February 1962 said MacLeod had described Cheddi Jagan as “a naïve, LSE Marxist filled with charm, personal honesty and juvenile nationalism.”<sup>3</sup>

Juvenile nationalism is perhaps as good a description of Cheddi Jagan as one could get and probably explains why a West Indian nationalist of the stature of Norman Manley criticised him in 1953 for having set back the independence process in the West Indies.<sup>4</sup> He certainly cared for his people. He certainly wanted to improve their living conditions. He certainly believed in socialism but he was oblivious to the realities of the world around him. He was often careless, if not reckless.

Second, this thesis seeks to trace, for the first time as far as the author is aware the experience of British Guiana from early in the cold war (1953) until the colony became independent in 1966.<sup>5</sup> It focuses on the theme of Anglo-American cooperation in dealing with a perceived communist threat in the colony.

The British Guiana story between 1953 and 1966 holds great interest because, in 1953, the British perceived British Guiana as potentially the first communist state in the Commonwealth and by the Americans as potentially the first communist state in their southern backyard. How they met this threat has not been documented before. Nor has the story been told about how the British and the Americans cooperated to make sure that the colony did not pass into independence under communist leadership. The story of Anglo-American cooperation on British Guiana during the period 1953-1966 sheds further light on how the Cold War was fought in the Third World.

The British Guiana story also sheds light on how the Cold War struggle impacted upon the decolonisation process. One thing emerges clearly from the British Guiana story, namely, that the

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<sup>3</sup> Schlesinger's Conversation with Iain MacLeod on British Guiana, 27 Feb 1962. CO/371/175411, File: A 101/10382, 28 Feb. 1962. London. PRO.

<sup>4</sup> CO/1031/194. File: A/101/10382, 30 Feb. 1962. London. PRO.

Cold War struggle took priority over the decolonisation process. Nationalism and decolonisation both came secondary to the Western struggle for supremacy in the Cold War.

A third issue that arises is how the British Guiana experience relates to the Cold War in general. Many countries of the world that had been the subject of Cold War rivalry are still experiencing the aftershocks to this day. In the case of Angola for example, recently released archival materials in the United States show that the CIA had planned operations in Angola before there were any indications that the Cubans would come to the aid of the Government of Angola.

The Angolan conflict, which has its roots in the Cold War, might only now be approaching its end with the death of Jonas Savimbi.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the former colony of British Guiana, now independent Guyana, people had been brought from Africa, China, Portugal and India to work under Europeans in the sugar plantations. Forging a nation with these five ethnic groups plus the local Amerindian population would have been difficult in any circumstances. However, British Guiana, now Guyana, is still experiencing painful internal tensions and conflicts, particularly at election times, because a policy of divide and rule engineered by the UK and the USA during the Cold War continues to afflict the country.

The Cold War was fought in three theatres: in Eastern Europe, over strategic weapons, and in the Third World, the costs in the Third World were high. As Peter Rodman estimates:

"The human cost of the Cold War struggle in the Third World was devastating ...there could be no debate over the magnitude of the economic and social disaster that befell these countries, perhaps irretrievably. Much responsibility lay with local leaders and political movements but no one could deny that the overlay of the Cold War competition had added to the destructive firepower available to the local contenders."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This thesis is based on research done at: (1) the Public Record Office, London, (2) the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; (3) the British Trades Unions Congress Library, North London; (4) the George Meany Memorial Archives, Springfield, Maryland which has the papers of the AFLCIO and ORIT on British Guiana, especially in the period 1960 - 1966; (5) the US National Archives, Maryland, where the State Department papers are available for the period 1953-1966 (6) the Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas; (7) the Johnson Library, Austin, Texas; (8) the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts; (9) the Guyana Archives, Georgetown; (10) the Guyana Public Library, Georgetown, which has a newspaper collection covering the period 1953-1966; (11) the New York Public Library; (12) the Churchill Archives, Cambridge; (13) the United Nations (UN) Library, Geneva; (14) the UN Library, New York; (15) the Library of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva; (16) and The Cheddi Jagan Research Center. Georgetown, Guyana.

<sup>6</sup> Comments by Howard. W. French, "Angola Intervention: New Evidence: Old Files Contradict US account of war" *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), Tuesday, April 2, 2002. p. 2. See also a recent book by P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions, Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976*. North Carolina: North Carolina UP, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> P. Rodman, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World..* New York: C. Scribner & Sons, 1994. p. 527.

Unfortunately, many of the costs of the Cold War in the Third World have not yet been documented. In the case of British Guiana, now Guyana, its political history since independence has been troubled with deep ethnic divisions and polarisation. A question that arises is how the British-American response to the alleged communist threat in the country might have helped to sow divisions which have lasted to the present day.

## 1. The Literature on the Cold War in British Guiana and in General

This thesis is a contribution to the literature on the Cold War, the historiography of the Cold War, and on the Cold War in the Third World. It is particularly significant for contemporary purposes because it seeks to shed light on (i) the extent to which there really was a communist threat in British Guiana between 1953 and 1966; (ii) whether it was homegrown or externally fomented; (iii) how the British and the Americans perceived the threat of Communism; (iv) how they reacted to it; and (v) what is the legacy of their Cold War actions for the country today.

In his essay, "The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War", John Lewis Gaddis identified a number of areas where research was still needed about the Cold War. These included Washington's perception of the adversary in the Cold War and the need to consider the impact of US policies on foreign societies.<sup>8</sup> On the impact of the Cold War on other countries, he wrote:

"The American empire, like other empires in history, brought about profound changes in countries that came into contact with it. What the American 'pro-consuls' did in occupied Germany and Japan are only the most obvious examples: Americans were also on the scene, and attempting in one way or another to change the status quo, in places as diverse as Iran, India, Indonesia, Italy, and Iceland. Whether for good or for ill is a question we should begin to wrestle with, just as we have had to consider it for other empires stretching back from Britain's to Rome's. A start has been made...but much remains to be done...It is remarkable that we still have no full accounts based on archival research of postwar US relations with France, Italy, and Spain, and the whole of Africa and Latin America."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J. L. Gaddis, "The Emerging Pro-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War", *Diplomatic History*. Vol. VII, 1983. pp. 187-188.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, a recent study for the Rand Corporation, which traced the history of the Cold War and the role of the NATO alliance in 'winning' it, had only one passing mention about the impact of the Cold War in the Third World: a discussion about Soviet aid, and minor references to Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

Fred Parkinson's Latin America, the Cold War and the World Powers, (1974) discussed the Guatemalan crisis, the Cuban revolution, the Bay of Pigs crisis, the Cuban Missile crisis, situations in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and the rise and decline of the Guerilla movement in Latin America. No mention is made of British Guiana, which had been a significant cold war theatre.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., in A Thousand Days. John F. Kennedy in the White House, noted the absolute determination of President Kennedy to prevent any state in the Western hemisphere from going down the Castro road and thereby giving the Soviet Union a second bridgehead in the hemisphere. Communism, Schlesinger wrote, "...had both targets of priority and targets of convenience in Latin America. Venezuela and Brazil were the chief targets of priority. The main target of convenience in 1961 - that is, one which became attractive less for intrinsic desirability than because it was there - was a small country, an English colony, British Guiana." Schlesinger, after discussing the political tendencies of the two leading politicians in British Guiana then, the Premier Cheddi Jagan, and the leader of the opposition Forbes Burnham, and telling of discussions with the two, continued:

"...I reported to the President (Kennedy) that 'an independent British Guiana under Burnham...would cause us many fewer problems than an independent British Guiana under Jagan'. And the way was open to bring it about, because Jagan's parliamentary strength was larger than his popular strength: he had won 57 per cent of the seats on the basis of 42.7 per cent of the vote. An obvious solution would be to establish a system of proportional representation."

"This, after prolonged discussion, the British government finally did in October 1963; and elections held finally at the end of 1964 produced a coalition government under Burnham. With much unhappiness and turbulence, British Guiana seemed to have passed safely out of the communist orbit" <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> R.L. Kugler, *Commitment to Purpose: How Alliance Partnership Won the Cold War*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1994. p. 494.  
<sup>11</sup> A. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days. John F. Kennedy in the White House*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. p. 779.

It was, however, to result in twenty-eight years of awful repression and would continue to be a theatre of cold-war intrigues and subversion with disastrous consequences for the people of Guyana.

Thirty years later, at a seminar organised by the US newspaper, The Nation, Schlesinger would apologise for his role. The Nation in an Editorial of 4 June 1990 reported:

"Those present witnessed a rare thing: a private public apology. Schlesinger was quick to say, 'I felt badly about my role thirty years ago.' He conceded that Jagan was right about US intervention, although he said the United States was motivated less by a security concern about a communist threat in the hemisphere than by a domestic political concern. 'There was great feeling after the Bay of Pigs, where the impression arose that Eisenhower had prepared an expedition to get rid of Castro, that Kennedy had lacked the resolution to follow through it. It was just politically going to look very bad if the dominoes began to fall in South America...The fear was that Congress might use aid to British Guiana as a means of attacking the whole aid bill then before it...Then of course what really happened was the CIA got involved, got the bit between its teeth and the covert action people thought there was a chance to show their stuff...I think a great injustice was done to Cheddi Jagan.'"<sup>12</sup>

Cheddi Jagan, the political leader in British Guiana around whom the Cold War in British Guiana centered, in a book published in 1972, The West on Trial, offered his insights into the operation of the Cold War in British Guiana. He wrote:

"United States interference in our affairs dates back to the 1953 suspension of our constitution and more recently to the 1961 general election. During that election campaign, the United States Information Services (USIS) departed from its usual practice of holding indoor film shows and took such shows to the street corners. These shows highlighted anti-Castro and anti-Communist propaganda which dovetailed with the smear campaign being conducted against my government.

"United States citizens, Dr. Fred Schwartz and Dr. Joost Sluis of the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, openly interfered in our domestic affairs during the 1961 election campaign...The Crusade admitted spending the sum of about \$76,000 (B.W.I.) during the campaign which, in effect, was a contravention of the law.

"Apart from direct intervention, there was indirect subversion. The impression was deliberately fostered that the United States government was hostile to us and favourable to the Opposition."<sup>13</sup>

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12 Editorial, "Great Injustice done to Jagan." The Nation (USA); June 4, 1990.

13 C. Jagan. *The West on Trial. The Fight for Guyana's Freedom*. Dresden, Seven Seas Book, 1972. rev. ed. pp. 304-305.

He also wrote that there were "far more visits of US trade unionists to British Guiana in the 18 months following the 1961 general election than in the 18 years preceding that election."<sup>14</sup>

That the Cold War was at work in British Guiana comes out in the following piece written by Victor Reisel, an American, under the caption "Unionists trained in US to harry Jagan's Government" and reproduced by Jagan in his book:

"Jagan has organized opposition groups in an effort to take British Guiana's organized labour. If he succeeds there will be nothing to stop him from going internally Cuban. Realizing this, the American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD) - supported by US labour and industry - rushed to the training of six Guianese in Washington. Serafino Romualdi, a veteran anti-communist Labour Specialist, directs this Institute. Each of the six trainees has specific tasks inside B.G. (Guyana) labour...In Panama City on March 9th (one of the trainees), Ishmael, met Shannon Wall, N.M.U. President and Rene Lioeanjie, N.M.U. Co-ordinator...for Latin America. He told them that British Guiana's anti-communist unions would try to stop Soviet gun-running. Ishmael said they would picket the Soviet and Cuban ships at the docks...Ishmael made good his promise last week. There was intense fighting in the dock areas. It soon spread through the city."<sup>15</sup>

Hidden, Cold War hands were thus at work in British Guiana. The setting, and the methods used, will be related in this thesis.

## 2. Outline of Thesis

In Chapter 1, we set the British Guiana story in historical context and we examine the positions of the UK, the USA and the USSR on the Cold War in 1953, with particular reference to South America.

In Chapter 2, we look at the interplay between nationalism, decolonisation and the Cold War, keeping in mind British Guiana's experience.

In Chapter 3, we look at evidence in the Reports of Governor Savage to London and the reaction from London on British fears of a communist threat in British Guiana in 1953.

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<sup>14</sup> C. Jagan. *The West On Trial. The Fight for Guyana's Freedom.* *Op. Cit.*, p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> C.J. Jagan: *The West On Trial. The Fight for Guyana's Freedom.* *Ibid.*, p. 20.



In Chapter 4, we look at evidence in Reports of the American Vice-Consul in British Guiana and the State Department about a communist threat in British Guiana in 1953.

In Chapter 5, we look at evidence in the TUC Archive in London and the AFL-CIO Archive in Washington on the role of British and American Trades Unions in dealing with an alleged communist threat in British Guiana during the period covered by this thesis.

In Chapter 6, we look at diplomatic papers in London and Washington on how the UK and USA concerted their efforts in dealing with the situation in British Guiana following of the arrival of Castro.

In Chapter 7, we continue the examination of Anglo-American cooperation in containing an alleged communist threat in British Guiana in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In Chapter 8, we look briefly at how British Guiana has fared since independence in the light of the Cold War struggles between 1953-1966. We end the study by pulling together some key conclusions based on the evidence examined in the period of study.

We grew up in British Guiana in the period covered in this thesis and experienced some of the upheavals and disorder in the country especially during the strikes and riots in the 1960s. Why these events took place is therefore of particular interest to us.

## **CHAPTER 1**

# **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THE COLD WAR STANCES OF THE THREE MAJOR POWERS IN 1953**

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, we note the principal schools of thought in debates about the origins of the Cold War. We look at the place of the third world in explanations about the start and unfolding of the Cold War and review the literature on the Cold War in the third world. Keeping in mind British Guiana's geographical location in South America and its proximity to the Caribbean, we then focus on the attitudes of the three principal protagonists the UK, the USA, and the USSR towards Latin America and the Caribbean. The aim is to situate the British Guiana story within the interpretations of the Cold War in the third world.

## 2. The Cold War in History

The Cold War occupied a central place in international relations in the second half of the twentieth century. There are different schools of thought among historians on the origins of the Cold War. Authors such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr. who has argued "that the Cold War was the brave and essential response of free men to communist aggression" provide an "orthodox" or "traditional" interpretation.<sup>1</sup> By the 1960s, a revisionist school, which argued that the West misunderstood Soviet motives, challenged this view and that Stalin's policies had been misperceived and misunderstood by the Truman administration.<sup>2</sup> According to this view, advanced by writers such as Ambrose, the Soviets had been an ally in the Second World War, and had emerged from it economically and militarily weak, were understandably trying to pursue their legitimate security interests. A "post-revisionist" school has argued that both Stalin and Truman share responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> A. Schlesinger Jr., "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, No. 46, 1967, pp.22-52. See also A. Schlesinger Jr., *Annals of Brinkmanship, The Wilson Quarterly*. The Woodrow International Center for Scholars: Summer 1997. Other representatives of this school include, H. Seton-Watson; *Neither War Nor Peace: The Struggle for Power in the Postwar World*. New York: Praeger, 1960; H. Feis, *From Trust to Terror: The Onset of the Cold War. 1945-1950*. New York: Praeger, 1974; A. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1973*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Praeger; 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Representatives of this school include Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988; Bruce Cummings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol.II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*. Princeton, N.J, Princeton UP, 1962; R. Johnson. *Improbable Dangers: US Conceptions of Threat in the Cold War and After*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994; R. Craig, *Nation, Black Earth, Red Star: A History of Soviet Security Policy, 1917-1991*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1992.

for their mistakes and misperceptions that allowed the Cold War to take place. According to John Lewis Gaddis, US policymakers “were acutely suspicious of the intentions of the Soviet Union”<sup>3</sup> which by 1949 had detonated its own nuclear device and would go on to send the first astronaut into orbit.

In a significant new approach recently presented Trachtenberg has argued that the Cold War developed as a result of the alarm of Western allies over Soviet pressure in Iran and the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> London and Washington saw this as a breach of the spirit of “spheres of influence” while Stalin may have misread the degree of cooperation between the British and Americans, believing that the Americans would not help the British. This interpretation of the origins of the Cold War gives a central place to the third world to which we turn in the next section.

### 3. The Cold War in the Third World

The post-war period felt the full force of nationalism in many parts of the former European empires, leading to independence for many countries after long periods of colonisation. Independence for India in 1947 inspired other nations to seek a similar outcome. If the defeat of European powers by the Japanese was not enough to shed the myth of European invincibility, the defeat of British and French troops in the Suez Crisis of 1956 served as a reminder of the vulnerability of European powers. In its wake, the non-Aligned movement sought to avoid taking sides in the Cold War struggle. They would soon find this difficult, however, as some of its key leaders were ultimately drawn to one side or the other for differing reasons. To what extent did nationalist movements in the Third World and the many nations which gained independence during the process of decolonisation, suffer the imposition of the will of the superpowers? Were they

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<sup>3</sup> Representatives of this school include J.L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947*. New York: Columbia UP, 1972. See also Gaddis, “The Emerging Post-Revisionist Synthesis on the Origins of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History*, No. 7, 1983, pp. 171-204; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*. Oxford, Oxford UP: 1982; Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997; and Samuel Walker, “The Origins of the Cold war in the United States History Textbooks”; *Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 4. March 1995, pp.1652-1661.

<sup>4</sup> M. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.

merely puppets, manipulated by the superpowers, or were they able to effectively profit from the rivalry between the two?

This thesis is situated in the context of this debate on the history of the Cold War. In the wake of the demise of this conflict - the reasons for which constitute a fourth and on-going debate - it is possible to make a more balanced assessment of the impact on the Third World through a more dispassionate examination of the historical evidence available. The opening up of former Soviet archives should help historians to shed light on the accuracy of American threat perceptions. On this point, Vladimir Pechatnov's examination of Soviet thinking about post-war relations with the USA and the UK at the end of World War II in light of new evidence suggests that "the first full-scale estimate of Soviet post-war intentions was not off the mark in presenting the main concerns and dilemmas of Soviet policy planners,"<sup>5</sup> in that the American analysts "emphasized the security-oriented nature of the Soviet objectives, the severe restrictions on Soviet resources and capabilities, the complicating but not overriding importance of ideology, and the unlikelihood of the USSR 'embarking on [an] adventurist foreign policy.' The overriding problem was seen in how to enhance Soviet security positions, while avoiding, a break-up with the United States and the UK."<sup>6</sup> Pechatnov examines records from the Russian Foreign Ministry Archives (Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation) written by four prominent Soviet Diplomats between January 1944 and the Summer of 1945 – Ivan Maisky as Assistant People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs; Maxim M. Litvinov as Foreign Minister; V.M. Molotov's Deputy, and Chairman of the Ministry's special commission on post-war order and preparation of peace treaties; and Andrei A. Gromyko as Ambassador to the USA leading the Soviet team at the United Nations preparatory talks. To Pechatnov,

The overall picture of the Soviet world view and threat perception [in the immediate aftermath of the war] that emerges from these documents is quite

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<sup>5</sup> V. Pechatnov, *The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking About Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain*. Working Paper #13. Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., July 1995.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

predictable and consistent from the standpoint of Soviet interests: the main potential danger was seen in a re-emergence of German and Japanese aggression, while neither Great Britain...nor the USA...was regarded as a serious threat in the near future; their combination against the USSR was considered unlikely given "the Anglo-American contradiction," which provided the Soviet Union with additional room for manoeuvre. The underlying ideological hostility between the USSR on the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxons on the other, remained but had receded to the background...submerged by newfound mutual interests in preventing new wars and aggression.<sup>7</sup>

Whether access to these kinds of appraisal would have changed the course of American policy is open to speculation. Would these analyses have had any impact on the decision makers in any case? Vladislav Zubok's analysis of Soviet intelligence in the early 1950s, suggests a negative answer:

When Stalin died in March 1953 he left to his successors a deadlock in foreign policy, backlog in vital problems and a dearth of ideas how to solve them. The tyrant deliberately maintained an analytical vacuum below him. He reserved all final decisions for himself and rationales for those decisions shrouded in secrecy. They were hardly discussed at all (at least not in writing). Documents reveal the absence of "debates" in the Western sense of the word – even at the level of the Politburo. It could never function as a collective decision-making body, and it never had a staff that could fulfill the coordination function comparable to the NSC staff in the United States.

Stalin alone remained the person who defined all crucial directions of domestic and foreign policy.<sup>8</sup>

By the time of his death in March 1953, the threat perceptions of the USSR had clearly changed. Zubok notes that the "fear of collision with the United States was an immediate concern of the Kremlin rulers... New Secretary of State Foster Dulles was making bellicose promises to take 'offensives' in the Cold War and to 'roll back' Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. Stalin in the

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<sup>7</sup> *Op. Cit.*, note 5. See also H. Seton-Watson, *Neither War nor Peace: The Struggle for Power in the Postwar World*. *Op. cit.*, p.18.

<sup>8</sup> V. Zubok, *Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The 'Small' Committee of Information, 1952-1953*, Working Paper No.4. Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C., December 1992.

final months of his life was scared of it and passed his fear to the subordinates.” He notes Krushchev’s recollection that “America would invade the Soviet Union and we would go to war. Stalin trembled at this prospect. How he quivered! He was afraid of war. He knew we were weaker than the United States.”<sup>9</sup> Soviet intelligence at this time “confirmed the impression that the United States intended to launch, if not a pre-meditated attack, then a well-planned campaign of encirclement of the Soviet Union with bases and alliances.”<sup>10</sup> Given “the pressure of ideology and terror” [of Stalin] on the process of intelligence analysis, one has to be suspicious of the accuracy and honesty of Soviet intelligence report of the era. “It is obvious that sometimes the [intelligence officials] wanted to hedge the bet in their analysis or even to tailor it down to Stalin’s assumptions and expectations.”<sup>11</sup> However, declassified records of US foreign policy have vindicated most Soviet intelligence assessments, which “were not far off the mark.”<sup>12</sup>

Were American readings of Soviet intentions in Latin America on the mark? What were the real intentions of Soviet policymakers for the Third World? More to the point, what role did the small country of British Guiana play in Soviet thinking between 1953 and 1966? The author has not come across any materials on this point.

However, the point to note is that in the wake of aggressive Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, in the wake of the advent of a communist China in 1949, in the midst of the build-up to the Suez Crisis during which Egypt’s Nasser turned to the Soviets for weapons, in the midst of the Korean War which saw communist forces in North Korea invade South Korea and in the midst of struggles against communist insurgencies in countries like Malaysia, the USA and its ally, the UK, both perceived a common communist threat in the small British colony of British Guiana. Both would cooperate to thwart this threat.

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<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., V. Zubok. p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid..

<sup>11</sup> Ibid..

<sup>12</sup> Ibid..

By 1953, British Guiana, like so many other parts of the world, was in the throes of a struggle aimed at decolonisation. This process, through which former European colonial powers granted independence to most of their colonial possessions, decolonisation took place in the aftermath of the Second World War. The major contributory factors behind the relinquishing of empire included: 'imperial fatigue' or burdens imposed upon the colonial powers by their vast empires, the weakened political and military control of colonial powers over their overseas territories during the war, and the rise of nationalist movements within the controlled territories. The latter was fuelled by a powerful new idea, which inspired many nationalist leaders – the right to self-determination. United States President, Woodrow Wilson had popularised this right, earlier in the century, at the creation of the League of Nations. The United States, consistent with the revolutionary struggle for freedom from tyranny that underpins its foundation as an independent republic, emerged onto the world stage in the early part of the twentieth century as a force for the liberation of peoples from servitude, despite the fact that it also was in possession of overseas territories. Although Britain had granted a measure of autonomy through granting "dominion status" to some overseas possessions prior to World War II, the symbolic start of the decolonisation process was India's achievement of independence in 1947.<sup>13</sup> Thereafter, a great many countries would achieve independence, a process that lasted well into the 1990s. Namibia for example, achieved independence in 1991, under the auspices of the United Nations.

The road to independence, however, was a rocky one for many of the former colonies. Although many colonial powers suffered from "imperial fatigue and overstretch" they were nevertheless unwilling to surrender their possessions so easily. French and British immediate post-war colonial policies betrayed no intention of relinquishing their colonial possessions. Instead, in cases where they had lost control, they sought to re-establish their dominance. This was the case in Malaya for example, using the urgency of the communist threat in the context of a confrontation between two ideologies, communism and capitalism, Britain sought to re-impose its authority over

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<sup>13</sup> Some other countries had declared their independence before, e.g., Indonesia did so in 1945, as the Japanese



Malaya. A twelve-year “emergency”, during which police or military action was taken to root out communist sympathisers, came to an end only in the early 1960s. Malaya achieved independence in 1957. In Algeria the French fought a bloody war to try to retain control, but in vain. The Netherlands also launched a police action in the Dutch East Indies in an equally bloody effort to retain control over these territories, which became known as Indonesia. The latter’s independence was recognised by the Netherlands in 1949.

Guyana’s path to independence, though less bloody, was equally turbulent. It was not exempt from the nationalist, anti-colonial fervour of the times. Though the British had contemplated independence for Guyana by the early 1960s, it was to be achieved on British terms and consistent with the anti-communist policies of successive British governments of that era. The United States which had been the archenemy of communist expansion, joined willingly in the effort to achieve a non-communist independent Guyana.

This is not the first example of UK–US cooperation towards meeting common strategic objectives, and more specifically of UK-US cooperation to plot against an elected government. The UK and the US cooperated in mounting a coup against the elected prime minister of Iran in 1953. The common objective was Iran’s oil fields.<sup>14</sup> Though somewhat belatedly, in light of new evidence which emerged from the CIA records, US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, in March 2000, admitted, the coup’s role in creating bad relations between the US and Iran:

“The Eisenhower Administration believed its actions were justified for strategic reasons. But the coup was clearly a setback for Iran’s political development. And it is easy to see now why many Iranians continue to resent this intervention by America in their internal affairs.”<sup>15</sup>

As noted in a recent article in the International Herald Tribune, Britain occupied Iran in World War II to protect a supply route to its ally, the Soviet Union, and to prevent the oil from falling into the hands of the Nazis. Britain forced out the monarch, Reza Shah, whom it regarded as

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surrendered.

<sup>14</sup> J. Risen, “CIA’s Secret History: Files Reveal US Role in Coup for the Shah,” IHT, 17 April 2000, <http://www.iht.com/IHT/TODAY/MON/FPAGE/shah.2.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid..

unmanageable, and replaced him with his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Britain retained control over Iran's oil after the war through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co. In 1951, Iran's parliament voted to nationalise the oil industry, and legislators backing the law elected its leading advocate, as prime minister, who refused to back down to British threats of sanctions. According to a history of CIA involvement, written in 1954, the US was initially reluctant to consider the case but agreed to study it. In March 1953, the CIA Tehran station reported that an Iranian general had approached the US Embassy about supporting an army-led coup. On April 4, Allen Dulles, then CIA Director, approved \$1 million to be used "in a way that would bring to power a government which would reach an equitable oil settlement, enabling Iran to become economically sound and financially solvent, and which would vigorously prosecute the dangerously strong Communist Party." In May 1953 the CIA sent Mr. Wilber to Cyprus to plan the coup. In early June 1953, US and British intelligence officials met and put the finishing touches on the strategy. Kermit Roosevelt, grandson of Theodore Roosevelt, eventually directed the plan. On July 11, 1954 Eisenhower agreed to the plan.

The US and the UK would also do their best, in British Guiana, to oust a popularly elected leader from power. In order to understand the regional setting in which this took place, we examine briefly below the cold war stances of the UK, the USA and the USSR in 1953, with particular regard to South America.

#### **4. The Cold War Stances of the Three Major Powers in 1953**

##### **a. The United States of America <sup>16</sup>**

The Second World War ended with the United States of America as a leading world power. Latin America and the Caribbean remained under the Monroe doctrine. The Truman Doctrine of 12 March 1947 proclaimed:

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<sup>16</sup> This summary draws on an essay by L. Bethell and I. Roxborough. "The Impact of the Cold War on Latin America", in M. P. Leffler and D.S. Painter (eds). *Origins of the Cold War*. London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 293-316.

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.

"I believe that we must assist free peoples to work out their own destiny in their own way".<sup>17</sup>

The containment of communism thus became a special concern of American foreign policy. How did it apply to Latin America? We shall look at this next.

#### i) The US and South America

From the US point of view, Latin America was a relatively safe region. The Soviet threat was not imminent, whereas in the Eurasian landmass - Western Europe and the Near East - great danger was felt. Trachtenberg has written that "...the Cold War did not develop out of a conflict over Eastern Europe but rather out of the Western allies" increasing alarm about Soviet pressure elsewhere, especially in Iran and the Middle East in general.<sup>18</sup> The Truman doctrine was conceived as a result of the perceived Soviet threat in Turkey and Greece. Latin America was therefore given low strategic priority and placed low in United States strategic concerns.<sup>19</sup> However, although Latin America was considered secure from external aggression the United States was nevertheless concerned at the possibilities for internal subversion from Communists. This threat was seen to come from the enormous political and ideological influence the Soviet Union had throughout the world in the pre- and post-World War II periods. It led the United States to monitor all communist activities in the Latin American region. To strengthen its defences, the War Department, in January 1945, urged US collaboration with Latin American armed forces to ensure the defence of the Panama Canal and six areas in Latin America which were considered of special significance either for strategic reasons or for their raw materials. These areas were so important that Secretary of War Patterson informed Secretary of State George Marshall in early 1947, that the threat of an attack on any of them would force the United States to come to their defence. The resources of these areas

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in, E.G Rayner, *The Cold War*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in, M. Trachtenberg, *Op. Cit.*, page 3.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in, L, Bethell and I. Roxborough. *Op. Cit.*, p. 308.

were considered essential to the United States because, as Patterson stated, "...it is imperative that our war potential be enhanced...during any national emergency."<sup>20</sup>

Although a CIA review of Soviet aims in Latin America dated 21 November 1947, contended there was no possibility of a Communist take-over anywhere in the region, the United States took positive steps to shore up its anti-Communist stance in Latin America. The Administration outlined its policies in State Department Policy Planning Staff document PPS 26 (22 March) and National Security Council document NSC 7 (30 March). It convened a conference of OAS member states in Bogota (March - April 1948) in order to establish a new institutional framework for the inter-American system in the post-war world. Resolution XXXII of the Final Act of that Conference embodied the policy of 'Preservation and Defence of Democracy in America' while affirming that the continuing presence and acceptance of Communist parties in Latin America were viewed as a direct threat to the security of the western hemisphere.<sup>21</sup>

A major concern of the United States was Communist infiltration of Latin American labour unions. As in Western Europe and the United States itself, organised labour was a major battleground of the Cold War. The struggle to defeat or contain labour insurgency became a global objective, and concerted efforts were made to reverse their gains. In its efforts to dampen their influence, the United States passed the Taft-Hartley legislation in June 1947 that imposed considerable restrictions on labour activities such as striking, collective bargaining and made it illegal for Communists to hold union office.

In Latin America a major US offensive was launched against the Confederacion de Trabajadores de America Latina (CTAL). A campaign was undertaken by conservative forces, operating largely through the American Federation of Labour (AFL), to drive the Communists out of the ranks of international labour. With State Department "informed assistance", roving labour "ambassadors" like Irving Brown and Serafino Romualdi, were sent out to Latin America to

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in, Bethell and I. Roxborough. *Op. Cit.*, p.309.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in, Bethell and I. Roxborough. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

organise support for pro-American trade unionism.<sup>22</sup> A "favourable climate" for investment was thus created. A "democratic" government in Latin America would more often than not live in the shadow of a vigilant and increasingly ideologically motivated military, and if it moved too far toward labour or the left it could be overthrown."<sup>23</sup> As George Kennan stated during a visit to Rio de Janeiro in 1950 "it is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by Communists."<sup>24</sup>

The result was that, in practice, internal political differences in South American countries were often perceived as international communist conspiracies. Guatemala was of particular interest in this regard.

## ii) Guatemala

In the early 1950s, Guatemala's political developments did not meet with the approval of the Eisenhower Administration. President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman had aroused the growing hostility of the US Administration by his dealings with Guatemalan leftwing politicians who actively and openly participated in the Guatemalan government. The US claimed that communists occupied important posts in the police department; the labour movement and the Department for Agrarian Reform. The US demanded that President Arbenz get rid of those communist elements within his government but Arbenz refused to comply with the request, which prompted Washington to describe him as a 'dupe' of Moscow.<sup>25</sup> President Eisenhower feared the prospect of the communists gaining a hold in Guatemala and envisioned communism sweeping through Central America. His deep concern was reflected in a statement to his Cabinet in March 1954: "just think what it would mean to the US if Mexico went Communist!"<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in, Bethell and I. Roxborough. *Op. Cit.*, p. 310

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315.

<sup>25</sup> "Goring the British Ox," *The New York Times*. 9 July 1954.

<sup>26</sup> J.P.D. Dunbabin, *The Post Imperial Age: The Great Powers and the Wider World*. London: Longman, 1994. p. 393.

The Eisenhower Administration therefore decided on punitive measures against President Arbenz, implemented them through the CIA and enlisted the support of Great Britain and France for its policies.<sup>27</sup> Arbenz was overthrown.

### iii) Cuba

Another case in point was Cuba. When Castro emerged on the international scene in 1957 his nationalist regime, acclaimed by the people, took steps and began moderate reforms both in the public and private sectors. The domestic reforms aroused anxieties in the US. The US had large investments in Cuba and Americans were the largest landowners in the country. The sugar industry, the mainstay of the Cuban economy, was owned by US nationals. When the Agrarian Reform Act was passed in 1959, the US felt obliged to react.

Eric Williams, a nationalist historian and Prime Minister of Trinidad, coming to Castro's defence, wrote: "Castro's initial programme was the typical programme of Caribbean nationalists; his movement was 'democratic, nationalist and dedicated to social justice.'" <sup>28</sup> Despite his rhetoric, Castro did make attempts to establish a working relationship with the US. Shortly after assuming power he made a visit to the US (15 April 1959) for talks with the US Administration but no agreements were reached. Unable to embrace Castro's uncertain platform, the Eisenhower Administration, in 1959-60, set the stage for the close Soviet-Cuban relations that followed. In March 1959, the President authorised a series of measures designed to lead to Castro's fall: (i) the termination of US sugar purchases, "a tool of diplomacy" as President Eisenhower called it, (ii) the end of US oil deliveries, (iii) the continuation of the arms embargo, and (iv) the organisation of a para-military force of Cuban émigrés to assault the island and overthrow Fidel Castro.<sup>29</sup> Eisenhower eventually engaged the CIA to rid Cuba of Castro.<sup>30</sup> As Christopher Andrew has

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<sup>27</sup> J.P.D. Dunbabin, *The Post Imperial Age: The Great Powers and the Wider World*. *Op. Cit.*, p. 394.

<sup>28</sup> E. Williams, *From Columbus to Castro the History of the Caribbean 1492-1969*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970, p. 481.

<sup>29</sup> C. Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America*. Pittsburg: Pittsburg UP, 1976, p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> C. Andrew, *for the President's Eyes Only*. Glasgow: Harper & Collins, 1995, p. 274

written, "Eisenhower was far more anxious to dispose of Castro than Lumumba." The President's greatest fear during his final year in office was that the communist bridgehead in Cuba would infect the rest of Latin America<sup>31</sup> This fear punctuated his remarks to Harold Macmillan in August 1960 that if Castro survived another year, "most of the Governments in this Hemisphere ...run the risk of being overtaken by revolution..."<sup>32</sup>

Having looked briefly at the US posture towards Latin America and the Caribbean at the start of the Cold War, we now turn to the position of the Soviet Union.

#### **b. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics**

In 1945, the major concern of the wartime allies had been to prevent a resurgence of German and Japanese aggression and this had remained the focus of Soviet policy until the summer of 1947. The Soviet Union, while recognising that the United States was the economically dominant capitalist power, viewed America, however, as a counterbalance against Japan on the Asian mainland and not as a threat.<sup>33</sup> As regards relations between the United States and Britain, Stalin felt that while the two nations had joined effectively to wage war against Germany, their interests were too divergent to allow the capitalist powers to combine and turn on communism.<sup>34</sup> Stalin nurtured lingering concerns about allied wartime relations but, mindful of the Soviet Union's military weakness, he sought to preserve the remaining parts of the collaborative wartime relationship.<sup>35</sup> Soviet strength was not on par with US military capacity, but the Soviet Union's geo-strategic position had significantly improved. However, they had to face the fact that the US had the atomic bomb. For reasons such as these, Soviet military requirements, as perceived in 1944-1945, remained essentially the same as those formulated in the inter-war years.<sup>36</sup>

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31 C. Andrew, *for the President's Eyes Only*. Glasgow. Op. Cit., p. 253.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 254.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 103

33 *Ibid.*, p. 274.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

36 M. MccGuire, "National Security and US Foreign Policy," in P. Leffler and D. S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 63.

By 1946, the Soviet Union had to adjust its thinking following the shift in US policy to one of containment. As a result the Soviet Union, in 1947, shifted its focus from a resurgent Germany in fifteen to twenty years time to a capitalist coalition led by the English-speaking powers that would be ready for war in five to six years. The Soviet Union concluded that West Germany and Japan would be part of that coalition. Hence the gravity and immediacy of the threat were sharply heightened. Defence of the homeland now became the core of Soviet national strategy. The requirement to rebuild the Soviet military-industrial base was considered paramount and that could be achieved by demanding the imposition of punitive reparations, aimed at dismantling Germany's military-industrial base and thereby destroy its war-making capacity.<sup>37</sup> Stalin rejected the option of collective security, which had failed in the 1930s, in favour of a protective barrier of Soviet-oriented buffer states. Since Russia needed strong and friendly countries on its borders, this implied Communist-controlled governments, and nowhere more so than in Poland.<sup>38</sup>

Against this background, American interference in Soviet policy towards Poland was seen as having ulterior motives. So too were US complaints about spheres of interest, given President Truman's re-affirmation of the Monroe Doctrine covering the American continent.

#### **i) The USSR and Latin America**

A prevalent American view of the USSR role in South America during this period has been put forward by Cole Blasier who made the following claim about USSR policy towards the region:

“The USSR is the only great power, and also the only government, which has sponsored, supported, and guided political parties in almost every Latin American country. Many of those Parties were founded by emissaries of the USSR. Marxism-Leninism is their bible, and the Soviet Union is their model state...

“The Soviet leadership is irrevocably committed to national liberation movements and the ultimate achievement of socialism in Latin America. The Soviet commitment in all official institutions to these goals is probably more firmly held, carefully articulated, and consistently pursued than is the US commitment to encourage democracy and free enterprise abroad. In the

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37 M. McGuire, “National Security and US Foreign Policy,” in P. Leffler and D. S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War. Op. Cit.*, p. 63.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 67.



past the Parties in Latin America have been perceived as instruments of Soviet policies, and they still are today,...<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Blasier continued, "Communist revolutionaries have been active in Latin America now for about sixty years. All have maintained as a long-term goal overthrowing the existing order, by force if necessary."<sup>40</sup> Blasier cited as evidence for the foregoing statements the positions taken by conferences of Communist and Worker's Parties and the "Regional Conferences of the Parties of Latin America and the Caribbean." He cited the following statement of the Latin American Parties at a meeting in Havana in 1975:

"The utilization of all legal possibilities is an indispensable obligation of the anti-imperialist forces...Revolutionaries are not the first to resort to violence. But it is the right and duty of all people's and revolutionary forces to be ready to answer counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence."<sup>41</sup>

Blasier proceeded to propose policies for the United States to respond to the Communist challenges in order to protect US national interests in the region.<sup>42</sup> His assessments should be read in the light of this activism on his part. Whether one agrees or not with the details of his presentation is not as important as the fact that he offers a picture of how the Communist challenge in Latin America was seen by US anti-communist crusaders.

It is interesting that the broad picture presented by Blasier finds some support from no less a source than former Soviet Premier Khrushchev. In his memoirs published in English in 1971, he wrote:

"After Castro's crushing victory over the counter-revolutionaries we intensified our military aid to Cuba...We were quite sure that the Americans would never reconcile themselves to the existence of Castro's Cuba. They feared, as much as we hoped, that a socialist Cuba might become a magnet that would attract other Latin American countries to socialism. Given the continual threat of American interference in the Caribbean, what should our own policy be?

"The fate of Cuba and the maintenance of Soviet prestige in that part of the world preoccupied me...We had to establish a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean. But what exactly? The logical answer was

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39 Blasier, *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

missiles. We knew that American missiles were aimed against us in Turkey and Italy, to say nothing of West Germany...

"I had the idea of installing missiles with nuclear warheads in Cuba without letting the United States find out they were there until it was too late to do anything about them."<sup>43</sup>

Leonid Brezhnev also lent support to this view of an activist USSR in South and Latin America. At the Lenin Centenary Celebrations in the Kremlin, 21 - 22 April 1970, he stated:

"We take a resolute stand in favour of socialist internationalism and the restoration of good relations between socialist countries wherever they have been broken. We shall not be found wanting. The Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet Government will continue to work actively and consistently in this direction."

USSR Foreign Minister, Andrei Gromyko, was also disposed to welcoming Latin America. According to Gromyko, "a glance at the globe will show the vastness of the Latin American continent. Distance has not stood in the way of the desire of the Soviet Union and the countries of Latin America to form friendly ties"<sup>44</sup> He extended an open invitation to all Latin American countries to seek Soviet assistance and assured them of benevolence.

Having looked at the posture of the USSR toward Latin America and the Caribbean we turn next to the approach of the United Kingdom towards the region.

### c. The United Kingdom<sup>45</sup>

The end of the 1940s found the United Kingdom seeking the re-attainment of Great Power status and the recovery of its economic strength. Issues of priority concern to Britain then were: dealing with the perceived Soviet threat, developing Western European defence, and fostering the Atlantic Alliance.<sup>46</sup> With regard to the Soviet Union, the underlying assumption among British strategic planners was that it presented a potential threat to British interests and that therefore this country could not be accepted as a friendly power. Prime Minister Attlee believed that internationalist ideas were the best means of preserving world peace and maintaining Britain's global influence. He believed that key strategic areas, particularly in the Middle East, should be

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43 E. Crankshaw (ed). *N.S. Khrushchev: Khrushchev Remembers*. New York: Doubleday, 1971, pp. 210-211.

44 Andrei Gromyko. *Memoirs*. New York: Doubleday, 1990, p. 22.

45 See generally J. Kent, "British Policy and the Origins of the Cold War", Leffler and Painter. *Op.Cit.*, pp. 139-153.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 145.

placed under the control of the United Nations and that Britain should confront the Russians with the requirements of a world organisation for peace and not with the defence needs of the British Empire. He thought that in an international forum such as the United Nations, Britain could hope to regain equality with the US and the Soviet Union, particularly at a time when Great Britain was viewed as the junior partner in the alliance.<sup>47</sup> By working within a world organisation, Britain could play the role of a great power on a par with the US and the Soviet Union.

Latin America was mainly of economic interest to the United Kingdom, as we shall see in the following section.

### **i) The United Kingdom and South America**

A recent study of Britain and Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found that the stock of British capital in Latin America halved between 1939 and 1949.<sup>48</sup> As nationalist and reformist governments spread in Latin America in the 1940s, Victor Perowne, the head of the South American Department of the Foreign Office, called for a reappraisal of Britain's relationship with the region in the light of its potential as a source of raw materials and as a market, and its growing significance in world affairs.

After the Second World War several Latin American and Caribbean countries had faced serious problems because Britain could no longer offer new investments, an adequate market, or the goods they needed, and yet Britain still retained control of significant assets in the region and of the Latin American Special Accounts. Negotiations on the repatriation of British investments, especially from holdings of government bonds and the railway companies and public utilities in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, occurred immediately after the Second World War and soon reduced the role of Britain's financial interests. Britain thereafter had little basis left for a continued financial and commercial relationship with Latin America and further retreated towards the apparent security of the empire.<sup>49</sup> By the mid 1960s the Empire would be largely gone. As we saw

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47 J. Kent. *Op. Cit.*, p. 144.

48 R. Miller. *Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London, Longman, 1993, p. 230.

49 R. Miller. *Ibid.*, p. 232.

above, Perowne had argued that emphasis should be placed on trade rather than, as hitherto, on safeguarding Britain's historical position as owners of invested capital. To this end, he advised that the British government should encourage trade through the provision of better credit facilities, work to eliminate the territorial disputes affecting British Honduras, British Guiana, and the Falklands, and make extensive use of cultural diplomacy in order to enhance British prestige in Latin America. But even trade association eventually decreased; for example: Latin America took 7 per cent of Britain's total exports in 1950 but only 1.2 per cent in 1988. Britain's share of Latin American imports fell over the same period from 6.8 per cent to 2.2 per cent. Alongside this continuing decline in the commercial relationship and direct investment, the British Government's interest in Latin America also faltered. Between 1945 and 1982 only two British Foreign Secretaries visited Latin America.<sup>50</sup>

#### **d. Recapitulation**

From the foregoing presentations of the perspectives and policies of the USA, the USSR, and the UK, we have seen that while Britain, at the start of the cold war, was concerned about the preservation of its empire, that empire was a thing of the past by the mid 1960s, when British Guiana became independent Guyana. The main battle lines in the Cold War in South America were drawn between the United States and the USSR, with Britain in a supportive role to the USA in situations such as those in British Guiana.

At the beginning of 1953, Britain wanted Cheddi Jagan, the nationalist leader in British Guiana to operate within the British Westminster model. Later in 1953, after giving British Guiana one of the early internal self-governing constitutions, the British suspended that constitution on 9 October 1953 because of a perceived communist threat led by Cheddi Jagan. In 1953, the US shared British objectives that British Guiana should respect the British constitutional model.

One can summarise British and American objectives regarding British Guiana during the period 1953-1966 as follows:

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<sup>50</sup> R. Miller, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 247-248.

a. British Objectives 1953-1966

- i. Bring British Guiana to independence
- ii. Bring British Guiana into the West Indian Federation
- iii. Maintain the Westminster model of government
- iv. Seek American assistance for British Guiana to help it develop and to reduce the socialist appeal through:-
  - a. economic aid
  - b. enhancement of Cheddi Jagan's stature in the eyes of the Guianese people.The British Government asked that President Kennedy meet personally with Jagan. This gesture was to show the people how the West treated and respected Heads of States.

b. US Objectives 1953 - 1966:

- i. To keep Cheddi Jagan from power
- ii. To prevent Cheddi Jagan from becoming the leader of the country that would take it to independence
- iii. To prevent another communist state in South America, following Castro's Cuba in 1961
- iv. To seek British cooperation in preventing British Guiana from achieving independence under Jagan
- v. To draw upon the assistance of the AFL-CIO in fomenting strikes and disturbances against Jagan and his party to oust him from power.

c. USSR Objectives 1953-1966

There is no evidence that the USSR had a direct role in British Guiana in 1953. Its interest in the country during the period under study would develop into one of support for anti-capitalist forces. With the emergence of Cuba, its interest in the area would grow and it was Cuba that would provide direct economic assistance to the People's Progressive Party of Cheddi Jagan at crucial periods, especially in the early 1960s – during the strikes instigated by CIA Agents. Leaders of the Peoples Progressive Party would develop growing ties with the USSR and Western bloc countries and this would heighten fears in the USA about a communist threat in British Guiana.

### 3. Conclusion

This introductory chapter sets the stage for an examination of the evidence about an alleged communist threat in British Guiana and how the United Kingdom and the United States of America concerted their efforts to deal with the threat. Before doing so, however, we must first take a look at two broad movements sweeping the world at this time: nationalism and decolonisation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **NATIONALISM, DECOLONISATION AND THE COLD WAR IN BRITISH GUIANA**

## **1. Introduction**

The focus of this thesis is on cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States of America in dealing with an alleged communist threat in British Guiana between 1953 and 1966. It is useful to set the topic in perspective against the background of the nationalist independence struggle in the British colonies after the end of the Second World War, which coincided with the onset of the Cold War. As we shall see below nationalism, decolonisation, and the Cold War struggle intertwined in British Guiana during the period 1953-1966.

Questions that come to mind include the following: (1) What was the nature of Guianese nationalism as projected by its first home-grown political leader, Cheddi Jagan and how did it differ from the nationalism of other Commonwealth Caribbean nationalists agitating for independence? (2) How did the Colonial power react to leftwing/Marxist nationalism in the decolonisation process? (3) Was Cheddi Jagan, later a self-acknowledged Marxist-Leninist, a homegrown communist or was he a creation of Moscow, committed to its victory in the Cold-War struggle with the West? (4) How did Cold War considerations, and specifically the fight against communism, influence the colonial power in the decolonisation process? (5) How was the colonial power, Great Britain, influenced by its Cold War partner, the United States of America, in the fight against communism? (6) How did decisions taken by the colonial power for Cold War reasons influence the future political, economic and social developments of the country under study, the former colony of British Guiana, now Guyana, independent since 1966? For a start, let us look at the leading local players who featured prominently in the story.

## **II. The Leading Players in British Guiana**

### **a. Cheddi Jagan**

Cheddi Jagan started the post-war political awakening in British Guiana. He advocated independence early on, after 1945, and consistently struggled for independence for British Guiana.

He was a staunch anti-imperialist. He was pro-Soviet Union. He was often erratic. He sometimes said he was a democrat, at other times a socialist, at other times a Marxist, at other times a communist. He was described by Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod as “a naïve, LSE marxist filled with charm, personal honesty and juvenile nationalism.”<sup>1</sup> Governor Ralph Grey considered him a confused and inept leader.

**b. Janet Jagan**

Janet Jagan was a communist from her youth and a staunch communist throughout her life. She was a first-rate organiser and activist. The British identified her early on as the ‘brain’ behind Cheddi Jagan and as the person responsible for the organisation of the PPP from the outset along classical Marxist lines. She was free-spirited and flamboyant in her personal life. She comes across as the person of steel in the PPP and in the partnership with her husband.

**c. Forbes Burnham**

Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, was a member of the British Communist Party while a student in London. He was probably more steeped in Marxism than Cheddi Jagan at the beginning of their relationship, but was more pragmatic. He was said to be in the moderate wing of the PPP in 1953. He was determined to be leader of the party. He was identified early on, and proved himself, an opportunistic and ruthless leader.

**d. Roles in the political history of the country**

The early leaders of the PPP, including Cheddi and Janet Jagan and Forbes Burnham must be credited with having awakened the country politically. However, in comparison with other West Indian nationalist leaders, they, from the outset, combined nationalism with anti-imperialism and openly opted for relations with communist organisations.

Already in 1948 and even more so in 1953, PPP leaders were frequently confrontational, insulting and antagonistic. When in Government in 1953, PPP Ministers continued to act as revolutionaries instigating and siding with widespread strikes. After a period of moderation in the

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<sup>1</sup> See *Introduction* above, note 3.



second half of the 1950s, following the suspension of the Constitution on 9 October 1953, the PPP leadership at the beginning of the 1960s resumed their old colours. The PPP leaders appeared deliberately unmindful of a reaction on the part of the United States. What could Cheddi Jagan expect in the international Cold War situation then prevailing after he accepted in the Wynn Parry Commission in 1962, that he was communist?

### III Nationalism

Following his return to British Guiana in 1943 after qualifying as a dentist in the United States, Cheddi Jagan and his American-born wife, Janet, set about establishing what would become the first local political party, the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP). From the outset they advocated independence, the improvement of living conditions of the Guianese working people, and international working class solidarity. Much later, after having gone through several crises and still being returned to power in 1953 and 1957, Cheddi Jagan addressed the National Press Club in Washington in October 1961, in the hope of persuading the Kennedy Administration to let him go his chosen path. He did so in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and in the face of mounting claims by the Kennedy Administration that he was a communist committed to Moscow.

Cheddi Jagan's address to the National Press Club was one of the most coherent presentations on record of his hopes and aspirations as a Guyanese nationalist – even if, before and after the address, his policies and actions as a leader were much more erratic than his address portrayed, and could – and did – give rise to concern as to whether he was pursuing a neutralist or a pro-Moscow line. Nevertheless, we present him below as a nationalist patriot in his own words taken from his National Press Club speech.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The speech is in the Cheddi Jagan research library, Georgetown, Guyana. The citations here are taken from a copy of the speech in the library. At the time of research the library had just been established and did not have a cataloguing system.

Cheddi Jagan stated, "I am a passionate anti-colonialist. I believe that colonialism is wicked."<sup>3</sup> This declaration was similar to those of other nationalists of that time, such as President Nasser of Egypt, Nkrumah of Ghana and West Indian leaders such as Messrs. Bustamante of Jamaica and Eric Williams of Trinidad and Tobago. Cheddi Jagan added, however, "I would gladly accept any help from whatever quarter to help me in my fight against it."<sup>4</sup>

Cheddi Jagan set out in his speech the programme he intended to implement in an independent Guiana. The economy of British Guiana, Cheddi Jagan stated, was operating on the pattern of a colonial economy, one of extraction. He wanted to diversify the economy. He would nationalise all the important means of production, distribution and exchange. Through nationalisation, there would be more equitable distribution of wealth. The creation of new industries in the colony would make the country less dependent on imports. He argued for more of the wealth to remain in the country as opposed to the then colonial system of exporting it. British Guiana, he said, was serving as a marketplace for colonial products which was draining the wealth of the colony; "that has to be halted", Cheddi Jagan told his audience.

British Guiana, Cheddi Jagan explained, was a poor country. The people were poor and ill fed, and the housing system was in a deplorable condition. Due to lack of land development the people barely eked out a living along the coastal strips, which was subjected to constant flooding during the rainy seasons. He complained that there was much land space but that the Colonial Government had paid scant attention to its development beyond what was needed for the few products extracted from the colony.

Cheddi Jagan said that he wanted to make British Guiana, "his country", prosperous and developing, its people happy, well-fed, well-housed, and with jobs to do. He further stated that he believed that he could rapidly modernise the country's economy and provide "my people with the higher standard of living they wanted and have a right to expect."

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<sup>3</sup> Cheddi Jagan's National Press Club speech; *Op. Cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

To carry out such a programme, Cheddi Jagan realised that he would need both trade and aid. He needed to secure markets for manufactured goods at competitive prices. However, before he could embark on manufacturing, he needed finance and took the opportunity to announce that he would seek such aid from the US Government - among other donors. He qualified his request by stating that he wanted aid without any conditions that would limit the sovereignty of "my people."

As leader of an independent Guiana, he intended to pursue a policy of active neutralism. He made his position clear in his address, that he would not take orders from anyone: "I am concerned only with the urgent problems of the social and economic development of my country."

This was a coherent and well-presented position of a Guianese nationalist. However, in their actions Cheddi Jagan and his party had been, and would be far less disciplined and coherent. Throughout, the flirtation with the communist bloc, could - and did - reasonably give rise to the concern that he had opted for the communist side in the cold war. Nationalism, the cold war and the decolonisation process thus inter-twined in British Guiana.

#### 4. Decolonisation and the Cold War

Trevor Munroe has argued that, "...one has to see the cold war in countries like Jamaica and British Guiana against the background of the decolonisation movement and of 'Caribbean decolonisation.'<sup>5</sup> He contended that the British colonial state system had as one of its central objectives "combating the communist threat." Furthermore, the decolonising state was shaped by anti-communist imperatives which engraft an authoritarian dimension to evolving liberal democracy."<sup>6</sup>

On the first submission, Munroe noted that combating communism was one of the pillars of British colonial policy and that this influenced the way it dealt with nationalists in particular colonies. For Munroe:

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<sup>5</sup> CO/537/3824/71462, 1948; London. PRO. Cited by T. Munroe in *The Cold War and the Jamaican Left 1950-1955: Re-opening the Files*. Kingston: Kingston Publishers Ltd. 1992, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

The onset of the cold war had implications, not just for some colonies where communists were believed to be a threat. Rather, it meant that throughout the empire, local colonial administrations were required to assume new anti-communist functions and to develop new, more appropriate anti-communist structures both in the state and in 'civil society'. The first step towards this occurred in early 1948 when letters were sent by the Colonial Office to all Governors in African and Far Eastern territories 'asking for monthly political intelligence reports with specific reference to communism'<sup>7</sup>

On 29 May 1948, a similar circular dispatch was sent ...to all British West Indian Governors.<sup>8</sup>

These reports were to have a particular focus on the issue of communism: The Colonial Office, "especially thought it desirable that the monthly political reports should also cover information on the hierarchy and layout of any local communist organisations, personalities involved, connections of local organisations and leaders with foreign organisations, (for example, those in India, the USA, South and Central America or Moscow direct, including financial contributions) and general strategy and tactics of communist organisations on the colony."<sup>9</sup> On the second submission, Munroe argued that the Cold War between East and West is inadequately conceptualised as a phenomenon of international politics. He complained that within the context of the attention attracted by such 'international phenomena' relatively little attention had been paid to the specific impact of the Cold War on domestic politics and none had been paid to its impact on the internal politics of colonial states as distinct from the foreign policy of newly formed Third World countries.<sup>10</sup> Yet, he concluded, "...the Jamaican case does suggest that many state institutions, laws and procedures, to say nothing of political alignments, behaviour and culture, must have been profoundly conditioned by the cold war." This was very much the case in British Guiana during the period being considered in this thesis, 1953-1966.

Munroe made two other submissions which are relevant to our study: "United States imperialism was blinded by cold war anti-communism from making accurate or objective

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<sup>7</sup> Munroe; *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> CO/537/3824/1149597. London. RPO. Cited in Munroe. *Op. cit.*.

<sup>9</sup> Munroe, *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

assessments of radical anti-colonial nationalism” and “The British colonial state system during the Cold War constituted an impervious and monolithic obstacle to democratic advances by Marxists.”<sup>11</sup> Munroe concluded that the available evidence casts doubt on how far there was ever any real threat of the ‘cancer’ of communism in Jamaica, “certainly not in its ‘international’ variety in ‘stable’ colonies like Jamaica.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the questions to be kept in mind in the present study is whether such a real threat existed in British Guiana between 1953 and 1966. Munroe notes in this connection that when, in a number of colonial territories (e.g. Malaya, Kenya, British Guiana) the British colonial power was challenged by forces whose position on decolonisation “envisaged transformations more radical than its own,” it made extraordinary efforts to suppress radicalism and the United States, in the McCarthy era, followed suit.<sup>13</sup> Munroe, accepted the position of the author, G. Kolko (1988), that the notion of national communism had meaning, particularly in the emerging Third World, even at the height of the period of the supposedly monolithic ‘world communist movement.’<sup>14</sup> He thus raised an issue that would also call for reflection in the case of British Guiana, namely, if one were dealing with a communist-inclined PPP, whether it fell into the category of a homegrown national communist movement or was a puppet of monolithic world communism.<sup>15</sup> On this issue, Munroe, who examined some of the diplomatic materials on British Guiana, concluded:

“Regard for indigenous factors or, at the very minimum, apparent non-conformity with Stalinist dogma, is also clear from cursory examination of the Marxist Left elsewhere in the British Caribbean colonies. In British Guiana, for example, the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) was founded in 1950, as a non-communist party... Moreover, the Party’s program on the basis of which the PPP contested the colony’s first adult suffrage election in 1953, was particularly free of Marxist slogans and Stalinist dogma.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Munroe. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

He therefore concluded: "...it appears that the Guyanese Marxists' programme was more responsive to the realities of British Guiana than to the diktats of Josef Stalin."<sup>17</sup> This leads us to pose some questions for reflection.

## 5 Pertinent Questions

The following questions appear pertinent. First, What was the nature of Guyanese nationalism as projected by its first home-grown political leader Cheddi Jagan, and how did it differ from the nationalism of other Commonwealth Caribbean nationalists agitating for independence? Second, To what extent did the Colonial power take leftwing/Marxist nationalism into account in the decolonisation process? Third, Was Cheddi Jagan, later an acknowledged Marxist-Leninist, a homegrown communist or was he a creation of Moscow, committed to its victory in the cold-war struggle with the West? Fourth, How did cold war considerations, and specifically the fight against communism, influence the colonial power in the decolonisation process? Fifth, How was the colonial power, Britain, influenced by its partner, the United States of America, in the fight against communism? Sixth, How did decisions taken by the colonial power for cold war reasons influence the future political, economic and social developments of the country under study, the former colony of British Guiana, now Guyana, independent since 1966? In British Guiana, as will be seen in this thesis, Nathaniel Critchlow had established a local trade union in 1919. However, there had been no local political movement until Cheddi Jagan and his colleagues established the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) in 1946. The PPP was formed a short time later, on 1 January 1950, and it won the first elections it contested, in April 1953. There were thus only seven years between the establishment of PAC and the PPP coming to power. Few members of the PPP Government in 1953 had ever served in Parliament before and none had prior experience of governing. This must be taken into account in assessing the quality of PPP-led nationalism at this time.

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<sup>17</sup> Munroe. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 42-44.

Another point of relevance is that, whereas, in the rest of the West Indies, nationalist leaders had moved in a British orbit and the United Kingdom, Cheddi Jagan received his education in the United States, and returned home in 1943, with his wife, who had been a member of the Communist Party in the USA during her youth. A mere ten years elapsed from the time they returned there in 1943 to the time the PPP took power in 1953. The radicalism of the Jagans in comparison to those of Bustamante and Manley in Jamaica could be explained by a lack of understanding of how to deal with the British.

There is no doubt that Cheddi and Janet Jagan wished to improve the lot of the ordinary Guianese and they both deserved credit for lifetimes devoted to this end. But it remains a fact that, from the outset, the structure of the PPP was organised around classical communist lines with cells, peace committees, and that the PPP openly gave the impression, by their contacts with communist countries, of having chosen the Soviet side as the Cold War was getting under way.

From these perspectives, nationalism, decolonisation and the Cold War inter-twined in British Guiana in a way that no other British colony in the Caribbean had seen hitherto. The nationalism of Cheddi Jagan was directly linked with his anti-western and pro-Soviet position. Already in 1953, when he first took power, Cheddi Jagan suggested the possibility of obtaining Russian technicians.<sup>18</sup> The larger story shows that the British Government would in no circumstances allow a committed Marxist to lead one of its colonies, given the intense Cold War struggle under way.<sup>19</sup> All of the available evidence points to the conclusion that Cheddi Jagan was a homegrown Marxist-Leninist. While there is some flimsy evidence of support from communist countries, there is no substantial evidence that Cheddi Jagan was a creation of Moscow. The evidence will show that Britain was prepared to allow Cheddi Jagan to lead his country into

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<sup>18</sup> "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-31 July 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/345/04; 5 Aug. 1953. London. PRO, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Russia, China and the West. Pamphlet prepared by the Central Office of Information for British Information Services. Ref.# 5815/68. London: HMSO. June 1962.

independence because he was considered a mild, aimable Marxist. However, its partner in the fight against communism resolutely opposed this.

The evidence will also show, particularly in Chapter 8 below, that decisions taken by Britain and the US because of Cold War reasons continue to have severe negative impact upon the country to this day, even though it achieved 'independence' in 1966.

## **5. Conclusion**

Having set out in this and the preceding chapters the background, context, and global currents in which the situation in British Guiana unfolded during the period 1953-1966, we shall now proceed to examine the historical materials that can shed light on the issue of cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States of America in dealing with the perceived communist threat in the colony. We begin with British fears that the colony of British Guiana risked becoming the first communist state in the Commonwealth and South America.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **BRITISH GUIANA: THE FIRST COMMUNIST STATE IN THE COMMONWEALTH AND IN SOUTH AMERICA?**

**BRITISH PERSPECTIVES, 1953**

## 1. Introduction

Between 1951-1953, the British Government worked towards the introduction in British Guiana of an internal self-governing constitution. This came about in 1953 with the holding of elections on 27 April 1953. Even as this process unfolded, Governor Savage sent back regular reports about the suspected communist leanings of Cheddi Jagan and his followers and about a communist threat in the colony. Following the elections which resulted in Cheddi Jagan's (PPP) winning 18 out of 24 seats, a political drama would play out for the next 133 days in which the local leaders openly advocated leftwing causes and policies while Governor Savage viewed the situation with growing concern. This would lead to the suspension of the constitution and the re-instatement of direct British rule.

The events in British Guiana at the time attracted a great deal of interest in Britain and the United States to the extent that the British newspaper, the Daily Herald, wrote to the Colonial Office asking for confirmation that if British Guiana went communist it would be "the first Communist State in the Commonwealth and South America."<sup>1</sup>

Cheddi and Janet Jagan of the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP) openly expressed strong leftwing positions. Janet Jagan herself was known to have belonged to the American Communist Party in her youth and to have been a staunch activist in the United States. The evidence presented in this chapter will show that the leftwing positions of Cheddi and Janet Jagan and their colleagues began to attract the interest of local British Officials already in 1948. In that year, the Colonial Office had already noted that in British Guiana: "...a certain Cheddi Jagan and his wife, known Communists, are making great strides in organising the Party there. No action is as yet being taken against them."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it appears that concern with a Communist threat in British Guiana was prevalent

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 15 September 1953 from the Colonial Office to Governor Savage in which Selwyn Lloyd first noted that the Daily Herald was enquiring about the possibility of British Guiana becoming the first communist state in the Commonwealth and South America. CO/1131/128, Folder: A 345/08, 18 Sept. 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>2</sup> "Communism in the Colonial Empire," minutes by Trafford Smith and Rees-Williams, 1-11 Oct 1948, CO/537/2758, in Roland Hyam (ed), *British Documents on the end of Empire 1945-1951*. Part III, 1945-1951.

at the highest level of Government. I. H. Harris, a Colonial Office Officer, recorded the following on 21 October 1948, during an internal Colonial Office discussion:

“The Secretary of State opened by saying that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had expressed concern at the danger of Communist infiltration in the Colonies; suitable arrangements would have to be made to deal with this problem and the time had arrived to take a stronger line than hitherto...”<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the British Government maintained a policy of steering colonies such as British Guiana towards self-government.

In this chapter we shall examine the Communist threat in British Guiana as perceived by Governor Savage and the British Government. We shall look at: Constitutional Development; The Rise of the People’s Progressive Party; The PPP in Office, 1953; The Communist Threat in British Guiana as seen in the Reports from Governor Savage; The Communist Threat as seen in London; The PPP Reply to the charges against it; and Anglo-American Co-operation.

## 2. Constitutional Development

From the early days of British rule in the mid 1800s British Guiana had had a representative constitution, which had been reformed in 1891, and abolished in 1928, to be replaced by an advanced form of Colonial Government. At that time the Parliament of the United Kingdom passed the British Guiana Act, which required any Prerogative legislation affecting the constitution and powers of the British Guiana Legislature to be laid before Parliament for a period of forty days before taking effect.

In parallel with the development of constitutional rule, there was a local movement for improvement of the lives of the people under colonial rule. This movement led to the formation of the first Labour Union in British Guiana in 1919, by Nathaniel Critchlow - the British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU). This Union dealt mainly with non-Indian workers. In 1937, Ayube Edun

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<sup>3</sup> “Communist infiltration of the colonies,” note by I. H. Harris of a CO internal discussion (18 Oct. 1953). CO/537/2758, no. 4, in Roland Hyam (ed), *British Documents on the End of Empire. The Labour Government & the End of Empire*. Part III, 1945-1951. Op. Cit..

had formed the Man Power Citizens' Association, (MPCA).<sup>4</sup> This Association dealt mainly with Indian workers.

The Constitutional Commission of 1950-51, the Waddington Commission, recommended a new and advanced Constitution with universal adult suffrage at the age of 21 and a two-Chamber Legislature with a ministerial system.<sup>5</sup> The new Constitution was introduced in British Guiana on 23 April 1953. It gave to the people for the first time universal adult suffrage. It also provided for a bi-cameral legislature consisting of a Lower Chamber (the House of Assembly) and an Upper Chamber (the State Council). From the House of Assembly, six elected members were to be appointed as Ministers with departmental responsibilities. The State Council, the principal instrument of policy,<sup>6</sup> consisted of nine members who were appointed by Governor Savage. Under the arrangements in the Constitution, Governor Savage was obliged (save in exceptional cases) to consult, and take the advice of, this Council.<sup>7</sup>

Under this new Constitution, general elections were held on 27 April 1953 and resulted in a PPP victory. The PPP obtained 51% of the votes, which translated into 18 out of 24 seats. The Party was in a very favourable position. It had secured the election of the six Ministerial posts from the House of Assembly.<sup>8</sup> Cheddi Jagan was elected Leader of the House of Assembly and Janet Jagan, Deputy Speaker. Messrs. Fingal and Robertson, both PPP members, were appointed to the State Council on the recommendation of the six Ministers.<sup>9</sup>

How had the PPP achieved such stunning results? In the next section we review the rise of the party briefly.

### 3. The Rise of People's Progressive Party (PPP)

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<sup>4</sup> D. Nath. *A History of Guyana*. Vol. III. London: Dwarka Nath Publishing, 1975. p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> C. Jagan. *The West On Trial*. West Berlin: Seven Seas, 1972; pp. 25-26. See also FO/371/161946. File: A/347/08, 3 Feb. 1951. London, PRO.

<sup>6</sup> Report, "British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution," 9 October 1953. London, HMSO. Cmnd. 8980.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministers were C. Jagan, Minister for Agriculture; F. Burnham, Minister for Education; A. Chase, Minister for Labour; J. P. Latchmansingh, Minister for Health; S. King, Minister for Works; and J.N. Singh-Minister for Local Government. See generally, C. Jagan: *The West on Trial*. *Ibid.*.

<sup>9</sup> Report, "British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution," *Ibid.*.

## a. Origins

The rise of the PPP is intimately linked to the emergence of Cheddi Jagan into the forefront of the political arena. Cheddi Jagan grew up at Port Mourant, a sugar plantation in British Guiana. His parents were labourers and had to care for eleven children. Although life was "hard" his parents managed to send him to secondary school in Georgetown, the capital city and he studied dentistry while working in the USA.<sup>10</sup> Cheddi Jagan met and married his wife, an avowed Marxist, in the USA.

Following the return of Cheddi and Janet Jagan to British Guiana in 1943, they launched themselves into local affairs. Cheddi Jagan's debut in public life began in 1945, as the treasurer of the sugar union, the MPCA. He served in that position for one year and left due to what he claimed 'were differences over the operational practices of this Association...'<sup>11</sup> In 1946, Janet Jagan, together with Mrs. Winifred Gaskin, formed the Women's Political Economic Organisation (WPEO) a body with far-left ideas.<sup>12</sup> Cheddi and Janet Jagan joined with a group of Guianese including Mr. Jocelyn Hubbard, a Marxist, who was the General Secretary of the Trade Union Council (TUC) and Mr. Ashton Chase, then a young Afro-Guianese trade unionist. Together they formed the political Affairs Committee (PAC) in 1946,<sup>13</sup> and the Committee adopted the same name, PAC,<sup>14</sup> for its Bulletin which enjoyed wide circulation. Cheddi and Janet Jagan formed a discussion group that met regularly at the Carnegie Library in Georgetown.<sup>15</sup> Through these meetings Cheddi and Janet Jagan came into contact with prominent people of all races and with labour leaders. The discussions centered on a range of issues and, with time, the Jagans became deeply involved in political issues.

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<sup>10</sup> See generally C. Jagan: *The West on Trial*. Op. Cit.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum, "The Peoples' Progressive Party", sent by Governor Savage based on intelligence by the Special Branch. CO/1031/128; File: A/345/08, June 15, 1946. London, PRO.

<sup>13</sup> C. Jagan: *The West on Trial*. Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Note: The name "Political Affairs Committee", according to Cheddi Jagan, was adopted from the "Political Action Committee" of the Congress of Industrial Organisation of the USA. The PPP 'PAC' Bulletin was the forerunner of "Thunder", the official organ of the Party. See, C. Jagan: *The West on Trial*. Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>15</sup> C. Jagan, *The West on Trial*. Ibid., p 62. See also C. Singh, *Guyana: Politics in a Plantation Society*. New York: Praeger, 1988, pp. 16-17.

In 1947, Cheddi Jagan was elected to the Legislative Council as a member for Central Demerara. Cheddi Jagan then gravitated towards more serious political issues by joining with Mr. J.P. Latchmarsingh, President of the British Guiana East Indian Association (BGEIA), who was trying to set up a rival union in the sugar industry. This new union, the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union (GIWU), became involved in a protracted struggle with the MPCA for a number of years.<sup>16</sup> It was seeking recognition from the Sugar Producers Association (SPA) to be the sole bargaining agent for all sugar workers.<sup>17</sup>

Cheddi Jagan's ascent to the forefront of the political stage was complete in 1950, when the PPP<sup>18</sup> was formed. He was elected its leader and Forbes Burnham, its Chairman. The support base of the party was comprised mainly of rural peasant farmers, sugar workers and some urban middle and lower class workers. The central features of the PPP programme were: political independence, improvement in social and welfare benefits for Guianese, and education in the level of exploitation of Guianese by foreign-owned firms, in particular Booker Bros. McConnell, which dominated the sugar industry, the life-line of the economy.<sup>19</sup> At that time Bookers had acquired almost complete control of the sugar industry and about 40 percent of the economic resources of the country in general.<sup>20</sup>

Following the April 1953 elections victory, the results of which we referred to above, Cheddi Jagan became Premier under the first internal self-governing Constitution of British Guiana. Governor Savage ascribed this rapid rise to power and prominence to the organising talents and

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<sup>16</sup> A. Chase, *A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana 1900-1961*. Georgetown: New Guyana Co. Ltd., 1965. p. 126.

<sup>17</sup> C. Singh, *Guyana: Politics in a Plantation Society*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup> This name was adopted at the suggestion of the British Communist Party. See C. Singh, *Guyana. Politics in a Plantation Society*. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> In a Memorandum on the "Growth of the Peoples' Progressive Party" Governor Savage drew attention to the fact that there never before existed any political party as such in the Colony which had a concerted policy and an organised programme for putting it into effect under strong and consistent leadership. CO/1031/128, File: A/345/10, 5 Sept. 1953. London, PRO.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum of O. Lyttleton, Secretary of State of the Colonies on the situation in British Guiana, 25th September, 1953. CO(53)261. File: A/345/18, 26 Sept. 1953. pp. 30-33. London, PRO.

“brain” of Janet Jagan.<sup>21</sup> Once the election was won, however, problems surfaced in the PPP. A power struggle ensued within the Party between the extreme leftwing and the moderate members to determine who should lead it in Parliament.<sup>22</sup> The main opponents in the struggle were Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham. In their efforts not to split the Party, a compromise solution was reached and Cheddi Jagan was confirmed as leader because the party's central committee remained loyal to him.<sup>23</sup>

#### b. The PPP Platform

The PPP policy was to bring a “Socialist new deal” to the lives of the working people of British Guiana. The main proposals of the Party's programme were as follows:

i) In the social sphere, it sought to offer free health services and workmen's compensation to cover industrial diseases, and speedier implementation of the Factory Ordinance.

ii) In education, the PPP campaigned for Government control and secular education (252 of the 269 Stated-aided primary schools were in the hands of one or other of the religious denominations). The Party favoured religious education in the schools; it wanted more secondary school scholarships and favoured provisions for more nursery schools.

iii) In the area of farming, the measures proposed by the Party included land reform, land settlement, security of tenure for farmers and provisions for agricultural loans. It urged the adoption of better policies for land drainage and irrigation systems. The purpose was to make uncultivated land available to diversify the agricultural sector.

iv) In housing, the Party wanted the establishment of low rental schemes in order to offer some relief to the lower income workers.

v) In administration the Party sought government land reform; introduction of universal suffrage, better control of the expenditure of the Public Works Department and an inquiry into its administration.

vi) In finance the Party sought an increase of direct taxes accompanied by a reduction of indirect taxes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Memorandum on “The Peoples' Progressive Party, British Guiana” by Governor Savage and a Special Branch Officer. 1953.” CO/1031/128. File: A/260/24, 25 Jan., 1953. London, PRO.

<sup>22</sup> M. Carter and R. Westmaas received particular attention. See “Extract from Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review for Quarter April 1-30 June, 1953: “Communism in the West Indies”.” CO/1031/119. File: A/260/26. File: A/260/24, 2 July, 1953. London, PRO.

<sup>23</sup> The extreme communist element was not expelled. See “Extract...” in note 22 above.

<sup>24</sup> C. Jagan: *Forbidden Freedom. The Story of British Guyana*. London: Hansib Publishing Ltd., 1954. pp. 47-50.

The Party sought to amend all existing laws and regulations that, in its contention restricted the civil liberties of the people;<sup>25</sup> to protect the trade unions, and bring into force a measure for the recognition of trades unions based on the US Wagner Act.<sup>26</sup>

### c. The British Reaction to the PPP

Cheddi Jagan's rhetoric and actions after his return to British Guiana in 1943, his political beliefs and his programme had raised concerns in both Britain and the United States. These had led the British Government and the United States to monitor developments in the colony closely, particularly persons with leftwing views. Cheddi Jagan and the other PPP members, who were known to have leftwing views, were kept under close scrutiny.

The regular reports provided by successive Governors of British Guiana to the Colonial Office after the People's Progressive Party was formed in 1950, provided evidence that monitoring of leftwing forces was being carried out. In June 1951, Governor Savage's report to the Colonial Office referred to the tactic of 'secrecy' used by the PPP. The Party business was, allegedly, conducted in secrecy - making it difficult, according to Governor Savage, to 'get first hand reports as to what goes on at these meetings'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Governor Savage mentioned that: "A fresh batch of communist propaganda arrived during the month and was distributed at Peoples' Progressive Party meetings throughout the Colony." The same report also discussed Cheddi Jagan's visit to Europe in July 1951, "with the avowed intention of visiting certain countries behind the Iron Curtain."<sup>28</sup> The February 1952 report warned that:

"...Their consistent disseminating of Communist propaganda and the Communist-line policies which they follow, can leave little doubt that the continued growth of this Party on its present scale may soon constitute a serious threat to the internal security of this Colony and the Party may well feel itself strong enough, in the event of any major industrial dispute arising this year, to

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<sup>25</sup> C. Jagan: *Forbidden Freedom: The Story of British Guiana*. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>26</sup> C. Jagan, *Forbidden Freedom: The Story of British Guiana*. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>27</sup> "Twenty-Fourth Political Report on British Guiana," 1 - 30 June 1951. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. 2 July 1951 London, PRO. p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Twenty-Fifth Political Report on British Guiana," 1 July-15 August, 1951. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. 20 August, 1951. London, PRO. p. 2.



deliberately incite disruption and damage as an illustration of their power and a testing ground of their strength.”<sup>29</sup>

The policies established by the PPP at its First Annual Congress in January 1952, again raised Governor Savage’s concern. The tactics of the Party machinery to infiltrate the trade unions, their plans to disseminate communist literature in the country, the creation of ‘cells’,<sup>30</sup> the anti-American attacks of Sidney King<sup>31</sup>, to name but a few were, Governor Savage felt, aimed at undermining his authority.

In order to understand how Governor Savage’s reports were being viewed in London, it is necessary to bear in mind the orientations of the British Prime Minister of the period. Prime Minister Clement Attlee (Labour) had been fiercely anti-communist. This had been born out of his long struggle to exclude communism from the Labour Party and the trade union movement.<sup>32</sup> His distrust of Stalin’s motives in the immediate post-war period, had led Attlee to conclude that Russia’s motives and actions would not be restricted to any particular area, but that it would be applied anywhere Russia tried to impose communism as it had done in Eastern Europe, in China in 1949 and in the Far East with North Korea in 1950. On British Guiana, the British Government, from what we have seen in Governor Savage’s reports, was aware of Cheddi Jagan’s and the PPP’s association with communists. Attlee’s Government was reluctant to liquidate the empire. He said, “the benefits outweighed the negatives.”<sup>33</sup>

Conservative Prime Minister Churchill, for his part, had been well known for his anti-communist stance. His famous “iron-curtain” speech in March 1946, at Fulton Missouri, USA had borne witness to this. After he was elected Prime Minister in 1951, in a party political broadcast he had said, “...whatever happens we shall stand up with our strength in defence of the free world have

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<sup>29</sup> “Forty-first Political Report on British Guiana,” 1-31 January, 1952. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26, 2 Feb., 1952. London, PRO. p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>31</sup> “Forty-fifth Political Report on British Guiana,” 1-31 March, 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26, 2 April 1953. London, PRO. p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> A. Farmer, *Britain: Foreign and Imperial Affairs 1939-1964*. Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994. pp. 37-39.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*.

against Communist tyranny and aggression.”<sup>34</sup> The ‘free world’ he spoke about would have included British Guiana. Churchill, realising the weakness of Britain, as had his predecessor, had no intention of ‘freeing’ the empire. He was a great defender of the empire and saw the benefits that Britain could derive from it.<sup>35</sup> Given Churchill’s stance on communism and his belief in the greatness of the empire, Cheddi Jagan’s strong leftwing position spelled trouble before long.

## 2. The People’s Progressive Party in Office, 1953

Having won the first general elections of April 1953, under the new constitution, the PPP formed the first Government in the colony. The PPP had come to power holding six out of the ten places in the Executive Council and with a working majority in the House of Assembly. As the Premier, Jagan was convinced that he could make a difference and sought to introduce a number of changes, including (i) bringing all schools under the supervision of government and local education committees; (ii) reforming local government so that there would be universal adult suffrage without property limitations; (iii) appointing working people to government boards and committees; (iv) revising the fees of government medical officers in order to make medical care possible for the poor; (v) curtailing unnecessary expenditure of public funds; (vi) providing more scholarships; (vii) bringing about social security and workmen’s compensation; (viii) improving drainage and irrigation; (ix) making available large tracts of land then uncultivated; and (x) reviewing and acting on the recommendations of the Central Housing and Planning Authority.

After four months in power, Cheddi Jagan would claim that his Government had achieved some success in the field of labour: increased rates for certain categories of workers, primarily the sawmill workers, employees in cinemas and hire-car chauffeurs; an eight-hour day for all factory

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<sup>34</sup> A. Farmer. *Op. Cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

watchmen; and a BWI \$13 weekly minimum wage for employees at drug, hardware, grocery and dry goods stores.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the PPP Government had been in trouble from the very first day.

In his opening address to the House on 1 May 1953, Governor Savage had charged the PPP with communist affiliations and Cheddi Jagan's failure to offer any denial in his reply, confirmed, in Governor Savage's mind, that the PPP had communists within its organisation.<sup>37</sup> The speeches made by Messrs. Khan, Ramkarran and Bowman using "communist catchwords and phrases" Governor Savage observed, "reinforced his conviction that they were past redemption."<sup>38</sup>

Governor Savage's report of June 1953, noted that the new Government had begun with a slow start in its first month. It claimed that the Government's inability to prioritize their activities had led to inconsistencies, inefficiencies and criticisms. The Ministers seemed unable to formulate any coherent plan of action for the country though Governor Savage had discussed with them the need to restore confidence in British Guiana's political stability in order to attract outside capital for investment and development.<sup>39</sup> This would not have been an unusual situation for any inexperienced government. None of the Ministers had any experience in government. Many had been employees of the Colonial Government in various capacities. With time and responsibilities and, most of all, the expectations they had aroused in their supporters, it was hoped that the new Government would make a conscientious effort to take over the reigns of government.

By the end of June 1953, the PPP Government had completed two months in power and, from Governor Savage's observations, the Government was still having difficulties in getting started. While Governor Savage was hesitant to criticise the Government, he felt that the Ministers

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<sup>36</sup> C. Jagan. *The West on Trial*. *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.

<sup>37</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-30 June 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26, 3 July, 1953. London, PRO. p.2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

spent too much time dealing with administrative matters aimed at satisfying their supporters and were not addressing the issue of 'governing'. In Governor Savage's opinion, the Government needed to address the promises they had made in their election campaign, while at the same time, implementing policies that would create a stable environment for foreign investment. The country needed foreign capital for development and only with some measure of confidence in its political stability would capital flow in.<sup>40</sup> In short, what Governor Savage was saying was that in order to create a stable environment, the Government needed to: restrain Janet Jagan and Rory Westmaas from attending communist gatherings in Europe; cancel the arrangements made to send ten Guianese youths "for indoctrination" behind the Iron Curtain; and refrain from "antagonising" potential investors.<sup>41</sup>

Governor Savage identified areas he thought were crucial and on which the newly elected Government should have been cautious in words and deeds. These included Sidney King's persistent attacks on United States "imperialism", the introduction of a motion in the House seeking clemency for the Rosenbergs<sup>42</sup>, and Cheddi Jagan's failure to offer assurance to the public about charges of Communist affiliation of the PPP, despite Governor Savage's urging him to do so.<sup>43</sup> These were the very kind of actions that Governor Savage felt the PPP Government needed to refrain from doing in order to allay investors' fears.<sup>44</sup>

In general, Governor Savage believed that while the PPP Government had given the impression that it was functioning with both the communists and extremists co-existing side by side in unity, there were signs of serious disagreements between the extremists and the moderates within the Party about leadership and policies.

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<sup>40</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-30 June, 1953. *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-30 June, 1953. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> The motion was introduced in the House by Dr. Hanoman Singh. The Rosenbergs were sentenced to death and executed in the USA for spying. There were numerous suggestions that Janet Jagan was a cousin of the Rosenbergs and that that explained her efforts to help the couple. However, as far as the author is aware, there is no evidence of such a relationship.

<sup>43</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

The evidence of this, according to Governor Savage, was that the Government began operating in secrecy, in order to prevent disclosure of the rift in the party that could have destroyed its credibility. The Government only introduced programmes for consideration which were not controversial or which had already been decided upon in 'secret' discussions. Under this veil of secrecy, Governor Savage claimed, he could not have done much to impress upon the Ministers the urgency of putting into effect its programme and thereby restore some stability within the country.<sup>45</sup> The country had pressing needs for development. In Governor Savage's opinion, Cheddi Jagan had made many election promises to the people about what the Party would do to alleviate their social conditions and those had not been respected. What had happened instead, was that the PPP Ministers were creating much trouble by attacking the Colonial Government's jurisdiction. The most disturbing features in the policy of the Ministers, he said, were the Ministers' attacks on the Departments, in particular the Police. The PPP, he had felt, made a concerted drive to undermine the Police Force. He cited Cheddi Jagan's speech at a Party meeting on 26 July where, he had reportedly stated the following:

"...For us to be your Government, we have to be given unlimited powers. At the moment the three main posts are kept out of our reach. We do not have control over the police, which means that if we were to start a strike the Government would call in the police to shoot us down."<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, the Ministers had attacked the Public Service Commission. In these spheres, the PPP Government wanted to replace the 'overseas' officers with local officers. In that same speech Cheddi Jagan had reportedly said:

"...They have appointed a Civil Service Commission because they do not want us to have anything to do with the appointment of Civil Servants. We do like to have the power to employ our own people who will be able to do our work."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Forty-Eighth Political Report on British Guiana," *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-31 July, 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. 3 March 1953. London, PRO. p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Such tendencies, Governor Savage assessed, were having an unsettling effect on the Civil Service<sup>48</sup> and would prejudice any chances of securing the overseas technical staff needed for development. But when this subject was aired in the Executive Council, Cheddi Jagan had suggested the possibility of obtaining Russian technicians, many of whom, he said, had been employed in China.<sup>49</sup>

By the end of August 1953, Governor Savage concluded, "...that the extremists in the PPP had gained the upper hand in the Government." Governor Savage reported to London that the tactics of the party had changed, that it was no longer conducting an open dialogue. He wrote: "Disagreements within the Party were no longer aired openly in the Executive Council meetings, hence it became more difficult to determine the extent of the rift in Party unity and to capitalise on it."<sup>50</sup>

Governor Savage reported on the anxieties he had recognised among Ministers that they had not been able to carry out any substantive work for the four months they were in office. To avoid any blame for inactivity on their part, Governor Savage concluded, the Ministers had adopted the tactic of absolving themselves "...to minimize their own powers under the new Constitution and to emphasise the restrictions imposed on them by the State Council, the pressure of the three Official Members and Governor Savage's reserved powers."<sup>51</sup>

Through the alleged inability of the Government to tackle the problems of the country, Governor Savage reported, the growing unrest in the country had multiplied and was touching all

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<sup>48</sup> In Governor Savage's opinion, the Civil Service Commission had to be kept free from political involvement because, in their official capacity Civil Servants advised the Governor on matters of policy and therefore should be free from allegiance to any political party.

<sup>49</sup> "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Governor Savage noted that there were a few Ministers who would like to make a genuine effort to make the new Constitution work: Ashton Chase and Jai Narine Singh, for example, but that they would not take a risk of exposing a rift in the Party. See "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> "Fiftieth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-31 August, 1953, CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. 5 Sept. 1953. London, PRO, p. 1. Cheddi Jagan had stated in the course of his speech in the House of Assembly on 28 August 1953, that if the Ministers failed in anything, the blame should not be laid on them but on the Constitution.

sectors in the country. The possibility of another round of strikes on the sugar estates loomed large while discussions about 'trade union recognition' were taking place under a wave of protestations and intimidation in Georgetown around Parliament building and its immediate surroundings.<sup>52</sup> Using the chaotic situation to its advantage, Governor Savage reported that the Government was able to push through legislation and succeeded in getting the Labour Relations Bill passed on 8 October 1953.<sup>53</sup> The Colonial Authorities, by this time, had decided not to expend much effort to prevent the Bill's passage since they knew that they intended to end the life of the PPP Government.

The preceding account of the events that took place during the PPP Government's term of office from 27 April 1953 to 9 October 1953, did not reflect favourably upon the Government's ability to govern. A general deterioration had rapidly taken place in the country. By the beginning of October 1953, Governor Savage concluded "that no action could be taken to check the PPP leaders, now firmly under communist control, ...in their arrogant and insolent career without serious risk of provoking public disorder."<sup>54</sup> Governor Savage, in collaboration with the Colonial Office, concluded that the British Guiana Government could not continue to govern the colony.

On 9 October 1953, the Constitution was suspended. British forces were brought into the country to support the Government to maintain law and order since, according to Governor Savage, the local police force was not entirely dependable.<sup>55</sup> A State of Emergency was declared. The Labour Relations Bill that the PPP Government unsuccessfully fought for lapsed on 9 October 1953.

Governor Savage and the British Government acted because of a perceived communist threat. In the section following we shall look at what they based themselves on in making this assessment.

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<sup>52</sup> For a general account of the atmosphere in British Guiana, see "Fiftieth Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit.

<sup>53</sup> "Fifty-second Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. London, PRO. p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> "Fifty-second Political Report on British Guiana." Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> "Fifty-second Political Report on British Guiana." Ibid.

## 5. **The Communist Threat in British Guiana as seen in the Reports from Governor Savage**

In this section we shall look more closely at the evidence adduced by Governor Savage in support of his assessment that there had been a major communist threat in British Guiana. Governor Savage had been appointed Governor of British Guiana on 19 September 1952. From that time he sent regular Monthly Briefing Reports, as well as, Special Reports that set out the communist threat as he saw it. Governor Savage's Political Reports covered the period, September 1952 to November 1953 and were many.<sup>56</sup>

To provide some perspective on how the situation evolved between 27 April 1953 and 9 October 1953, when the Constitution was suspended, we set out below the local and British Special Branch assessment of political developments in the country following the general election of April 1953. The Intelligence Report for the month of April noted "the smashing success of the PPP in winning 18 out of 24 seats in the House of Assembly." It attributed the PPP success to 6 factors: the thorough organisation of the party machine; the unprecedented success of African and Indian unity under one Party; the complete defeat of racialism as an issue in the general elections; the success of the PPP in identifying itself as the champion of the working class; the support from the indigenous professional classes and the desire by many people for a change from the old order. Special Branch concluded that the new Government would seek to give effect to social reform measures such as slum clearance and housing project, a higher minimum wage, old age pension at 55 and improvement in the unemployment situation.

The Special Branch further assessed that the PPP had sought during the election campaign to play down its pro-communist sympathy and that two Communist front organisations had also been

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<sup>56</sup> These Political Reports of Governor Savage cover September 1952 to November 1953. In these Reports Governor Savage, gave detailed accounts of the events taking place in British Guiana on the following topics: The General political Situation; Internal Politics; and General Issues, comprising a range of topics including: Economic and Labour. CO/1031/128. A345/260/26. London, PRO.



comparatively inactive during the month of April because the PPP executives who controlled them had devoted their energies to the election campaign. These two organisations were the Pioneer Youth League and the British Guiana Peace Committee. The Special Branch predicted that, "in the opening phase of the new Constitution all overt Communist activities will be centered on these two Organisations to draw the Communist taint away from the Communist Section of the PPP Executive...." <sup>57</sup>

The Report added that efforts were being made to interest teachers in the Youth League and that "the Regent Street Office of the British Guiana Peace Committee is most likely to remain the center of Communist propaganda under the control of Janet Jagan, Martin Carter and Rory Westmaas." <sup>58</sup> It provided a list of "Communist propaganda" distributed during the month of April by both the PPP and the Peace Committee. These included three publications on, People's China, published in China and one on 'Communism' written by L. Maraj published by the Arcade Printery in Georgetown. <sup>59</sup>

The Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review for the Quarter, April 1<sup>st</sup>-June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1953, provided further insight into the alleged communist orientation of the PPP. The "Security Review" stated :

It has been known for some time that the party executive was divided in its attitude towards Marxism. The extent of this cleavage was apparent immediately after the election when Burnham challenged Jagan's leadership of the Party and demanded the expulsion of some of the more extreme communist members, in particular Richard Westmaas and Martin Carter.

A compromise was reached, however, when it became apparent that neither faction was strong enough to exist alone ...The extreme communist elements was not expelled... <sup>60</sup>

The... other Minister who has a definite and current communist record is Sidney King. <sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Intelligence Report for the Month of April 1953." CO/1031/128. File: A260/24. 2 May '53. London, PRO. p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> "Intelligence Report for the Month of April 1953." Op. Cit., p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "The Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review." For quarter April 1-June 30, 1953. CO/ 1031/128. File: A260/24, 30 June 1953. London, PRO. p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

The Security Review added that the Pioneer Youth League had been much more active than the Peace Committee in recruiting during the period April to June 1953. It felt that the ultimate object had been to secure a steady supply of new members for the PPP. In the activities of both bodies, Richard Westmaas allegedly "...took a prominent part."<sup>62</sup>

What were the allegedly communist beliefs of leading PPP members? We shall look at the evidence on this in the next section.

**a. Communist beliefs**

Three weeks prior to the April 1953 elections, Governor Savage had voiced his fears about the communist leanings and strength of the PPP: Governor Savage stated in his report to the Colonial Office that the Communist elements of the PPP were the Jagans (the leaders), Sidney King and company. It was to this group, that he gave credit for the superior organising skills and the discipline imposed on its members.<sup>63</sup> The other grouping within the PPP that Governor Savage identified was the one headed by Burnham and Chase, the extremists, as he referred to them, and the ones who gave the Party its strength.<sup>64</sup>

It was reported that, since his return from a trip to Vienna on 5 March 1953, Sidney King's speeches had become viciously anti-British and anti-American - even more than they had been previously. Governor Savage stated: "it is clear that British Guiana now has to contend with another thoroughly indoctrinated Communist with up-to-date instructions in his pocket."<sup>65</sup> Sidney King, it was claimed, was deeply involved in the communist movement in British Guiana. He was said to be the one who had instigated most of the trouble on the Buxton Village Council.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review." For quarter April 1-June 30, 1953. Op. Cit.

<sup>63</sup> "Forty-Fifth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-31 March 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26, 2 April 1953. London, PRO. pp. 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "Forty-Fifth Political Report on British Guiana," Ibid., p. 2. The Report further stated that Sydney King had brought back a large suitcase stuffed with Communist propaganda pamphlets and correspondence with Communist contacts in Eastern Europe and England. It also contained "atrocious" photographs of Negro lynchings in the United States. p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> Buxton village was a scene of repeated disturbances on the sugar estates. Sidney King was a native of this village.

The Security Review clearly and effectively stated that the PPP orientation was Marxist.<sup>67</sup> The most extreme communists members of the Party, it cited, were Cheddi and Janet Jagan, Sidney King and Westmaas. Concerning the latter, the Review reported, "...there is no doubt that he is one of the most active and potentially dangerous communists in the West Indies."<sup>68</sup>

Westmaas, a Guianese born-British citizen, was also of concern to the British. He had been a member of the British Communist Party<sup>69</sup> and became active on the home front following the victory of the PPP in April 1953. Governor Savage claimed that he worked relentlessly rejuvenating the British Guiana Peace Committee, and also setting up the Pioneer Youth League (PYL) in British Guiana. Westmaas became the Vice-President of the PPP, a prominent and important position within the Party.<sup>70</sup> Governor Savage considered these as very serious developments and he reported that, "everything possible will be done to counter this move."<sup>71</sup> The British security assessment was that in its day-to-day activities, the PPP sometimes displayed a moderate version of its communist orientation, while the Peace Committee and the Pioneer Youth League (PYL) carried on the more overt communist activities in British Guiana. Both these groups were under the control of Westmaas.<sup>72</sup> According to Governor Savage, the PPP members carried out distribution of Communist literature openly. The groups and cells that had formed the backbone of the PPP organisation machinery, had become the centres of distribution. The popularity and intensity generated by the communist literature, he assessed, were major factors for its growth, its acceptance as the Party that cared, and for the final victory on 27 April 1953.

In his memorandum of 13 September 1953 to Mr. Lloyd at the Colonial Office, Governor Savage, reporting on the behaviour of Ministers in Executive Council, stated:

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<sup>67</sup> "Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review," 1 April-30 June 1953. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26. 3 July 1953. London, PRO. p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review," 1 April-30 June 1953. Op. Cit..

<sup>69</sup> Westmaas was a nationalised British citizen and had resided in the UK for many years. CO/1031/128. File: A/345/08. London, PRO.

<sup>70</sup> The "Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review," 1 April - 30 June 1953, described him thus: "...he is one of the most active and potentially dangerous communists in the West Indies. CO/1031/128. File: A/260/26., 3 July, 1953. London. PRO. p.1.

<sup>71</sup> "Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., p.1

<sup>72</sup> "Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Security Review," 1 April -30 June 1953. CO/1031/128. Op. Cit., p. 1

“Whilst in Executive Council Ministers have behaved themselves ..., outside it their actions and speeches are quite irresponsible and during the recent crisis have verged on seditious. In the House of Assembly this week Burnham has spoken of meeting “with sufficient force” any attempt to withdraw the new constitution and of being “willing to shed their blood, if necessary, for freedom.”<sup>73</sup>

“The extremist elements, with Mrs. Jagan and Sydney King in the van, appear to believe that by creating disorder and economic chaos they could force the issue of self-government earlier.”<sup>74</sup>

“For the moment there is no doubt that the extremists dominate the position and the moderates, if indeed they are moderates, are afraid to declare themselves publicly and even to tend to vie with the extremists on some issues...”<sup>75</sup>

Governor Savage assessed that the technique the extremists in the PPP used to hide the differences was to press for legislative action only in matters which would not split the party. Through the *façade* of unity, the Party was developing its organisation throughout the country and “to obtain party control of every possible human activity.”<sup>76</sup> Through this “insidious undermining process,” the party could in time secure a more or less complete grip of the country, “irrespective of whether I step in, as I shall no doubt have to do before long.”<sup>77</sup>

Part of the reason for this were the PPP’s alleged contacts with communist organisations. The evidence cited for this is discussed next.

#### **b. Communist Contacts and Organisations**

Already prior to the victory of the PPP in April 1953, Governor Savage had complained of the PPP’s close relationship with communists both inside and outside of British Guiana. In his Report of December 1952, he had identified some West Indian activists he considered a threat to British Guiana:

“...After careful consideration of the threat of further concerted action by communist leaders in the British Caribbean... it was decided to ban the entry into British Guiana of Richard Hart of Jamaica, John Rojas, Quintin O’Connor and John La Rose of Trinidad.

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<sup>73</sup> Governor Savage, Letter of 13 September, 1953 to Lloyd . CO/1031/121. File: A/345/08; 20 Sept. 1953. London. PRO. p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Governor Savage, Letter of 13 Sept, 1953. *Op. Cit.* in fn. 73.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

“The danger [was] that these fellow communists might come across to help the People’s Progressive Party in the general elections and the greater difficulty of banning them at a later stage; and also the generally favourable atmosphere for such action at the present time...”<sup>78</sup>

Governor Savage considered that there were also well known West Indian communists who saw the opportunity to further the communist cause in British Guiana and whom the PPP welcomed, much to his disapproval. At this time Billy Strachan had been a member of the British Communist Party and the Secretary of the London branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC).<sup>79</sup> Governor Savage identified Westmaas as a communist threat. Governor Savage knew of his communist activities in Britain, where he had been a member of the British Communist Party. When Westmaas returned to British Guiana, Governor Savage saw a great threat to democracy in the country. The PPP had made Westmaas Secretary of the British Guiana Peace Committee, which, in Governor Savage’s view was a prominent communist front organisation, used by the PPP to carry out its communist activities. Westmaas’ success with the organisation had led to his appointment as Secretary of the other communist front organisation, the Pioneer Youth League. Governor Savage expressed his concerns about these growing communist activities and wrote: “Everything possible will be done to counter this move.”<sup>80</sup> These men, he said, were working closely with the PPP to develop and strengthen the communist movement in British Guiana. They were staunch supporters of the PPP which had welcomed them in their midst and, as the Party was the Government, they were able to operate openly, free from the fear of sanctions against them. The overseas communists had years of experience, at the international level, which the Guianese communists lacked and as training took many years to be perfected, the Party, so Governor Savage reported, did not have time on its side to wait.

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<sup>78</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>79</sup> The Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC) was allegedly communist-dominated. Following the suspension of the British Guiana Constitution in October, 1953, it was the London Branch of the CLC that the PPP had requested to seek the assistance of the British Trades Union Council (BTUC) to provide a platform for Cheddi Jagan to make his case to the British people. The BTUC discussed the matter with the Colonial Office but the request was denied. BTUC Memorandum of 30 November 1953. *Industrial News*. No. 175, 13 Nov. 1953. pp. 2-3. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>80</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*.

Governor Savage complained that the PPP was sending students to Communist countries for indoctrination. In his Report for June 1953, he stated that the PPP had sent ten Guianese students to the Soviet Union for training. In his Report for July 1953, Governor Savage reported that, to his dismay, the PPP's support among the people had not waned and that was of great concern to him. The Opposition Parties had been unable to make any inroads among the PPP supporters. They were no match for the PPP organisational abilities and the thought of dissolving the House of Assembly at that stage, followed by fresh elections, would merely result in the Peoples' Progressive Party being returned once again. Governor Savage wrote: "...it would clearly be politic to avoid such a crisis for as long as possible provided that can be done without making concessions in vital issues."<sup>81</sup> Another area of concern to Governor Savage, was the alleged participation of PPP members at communist events. We discuss this next.

### c. Attendance at Communist Events

Prior to the PPP's victory in 1953, Governor Savage had reported on the domestic and external activities of the PPP. He noted that by 1950, Cheddi Jagan had been pursuing his campaign of liberation not only in British Guiana but also abroad. The decolonisation movement was gathering force in rallying nationalists and Cheddi Jagan was in the forefront with other West Indian leaders. At a Caribbean Conference in Curacao in 1950, he had moved a motion calling for independence for all colonial territories.<sup>82</sup> Cheddi Jagan's denunciation of British imperialism at the Third World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace in Berlin angered Governor Savage. His association and activism with leftwing movements led the British Government to conclude that Cheddi Jagan was committed to communism.<sup>83</sup> However, Governor Savage had identified Sidney King as the most prominent among Guianese communists active in the PPP.

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<sup>81</sup> "Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," 1-31 July, 1953. CO/1031/128. *Op. Cit.*, London. PRO. p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> British Colonial Office report to Governor Savage, dated 3 Oct. 53. CO/1031/1179. A345/10; 5 Oct. 1953. London. PRO. para. 102.

<sup>83</sup> *Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission*, 1953. para. 102. London. HMSO, 1953.

Sidney King had represented the PPP at several communist meetings abroad. In December 1952, he had been the PPP Representative at the World Peace Congress in Vienna and had returned there again on 5 March 1953. In that year he had also visited Budapest where he had criticised the poor social conditions existing in British Guiana and had ended his tour of East European countries with a visit to Prague. Governor Savage was concerned that "... upon his return to British Guiana, the man would inject more communist 'lectures' on the PPP supporters." Sidney King's anti-British and anti-American attitude intensified with each visit that he made behind the iron curtain, according to the Governor. Before Sidney King's return from Vienna, Governor Savage stated, "no doubt he will return fortified by further injections of communism."<sup>84</sup> After his return Governor Savage concluded that: "...it is clear that British Guiana now has to contend with another thoroughly indoctrinated Communist with up to date instructions in his pocket."<sup>85</sup> Sidney King concluded this spate of traveling with visits to Trinidad and Jamaica where he allegedly met with his communist comrades.

Governor Savage was concerned about the implementation of the practices learned abroad and the chaos that accompanied them in British Guiana as was witnessed in the Buxton region, where King was the representative.<sup>86</sup> Governor Savage referred to those practices as 'communist tactics' contrary to British constitutional practices carried out through open discussions and negotiations. Following his appointment as Minister, he had been active with overseas communist organisations. He reportedly had plans to organise a Peace Conference in British Guiana some time after the bans on travel and literature were lifted in that country in September 1953.<sup>87</sup>

Janet Jagan was also considered very active along with Sidney King. Within five weeks of the PPP victory, Janet Jagan went to Copenhagen to attend the Third World Congress of Women, 'thus

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<sup>84</sup> "Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., p.1.

<sup>85</sup> "Forty-Fifth Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> Sidney King was Deputy Chairman of the Buxton Village Council. The Political Report stated that the troubles in this village and at the sugar estate had been instigated by Sidney King. "Forty-Fifth Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit..

<sup>87</sup> "Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Review," 1 April- 30 June 1953. CO/1031/128. File. Op.Cit., London. PRO. p.1.

emphasising where her true sympathies lie.’<sup>88</sup> A few days before her departure, Janet Jagan had formed the Women’s Progressive Organisation. She had proposed to have this Organisation affiliated to the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a communist organisation. Governor Savage based his assessment of the communist leanings of the PPP also on the methods of organisation. We discuss this below.

#### **d. Methods of Organisation and Mobilisation**

Governor Savage’s Report of September 1953 gave a disturbing account of the ‘climate’ on the sugar estates.<sup>89</sup> He wrote that the discontent and prolonged troubles among the workers had been caused by certain Government Ministers well before they took office. He named the PPP members who had consistently fought to displace the MPCA as the sole bargaining agent for the sugar workers in favour of the GIWU.<sup>90</sup>

Cheddi Jagan, Burnham, Latchmansingh and Ashton Chase were cited as those who had openly tried to interfere with the smooth operation of the sugar factories. He charged that the PPP trades unionists had made many promises to the workers, but had offered no guarantees that they would succeed, in return for their loyal support. PPP trades unionists, it was claimed, had encouraged work stoppages on the sugar estates in the belief that the MPCA would give in to the workers’ demands.<sup>91</sup> He further claimed that PPP trades unionists had been irresponsible, and had been misleading the workers to satisfy their own ambitions. PPP unionists’ actions had caused “grave hardships” to workers with the loss of wages and they contributed to the economic instability of the country as whole.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Eastern Caribbean and British Guiana Review,” 1 April– 30 June 1953. Op. Cit.

<sup>89</sup> “Thirty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana,” Op. Cit.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



Governor Savage further named Burnham as having manipulated the workers at the Buxton Sugar Estate, forcing them to retract their 'Wages Agreement' with the Estate Overseers. He had reportedly advised the workers to pursue their claims in the court rather than through peaceful negotiations.<sup>93</sup> The significance of this interference in the dispute had been that it had encouraged further stoppages on the sugar estates thereby prolonging the strikes. By the show of force, the PPP had been hoping to force the hands of the sugar industry to make concessions in its policies and to accord recognition to the PPP union, the GIWU.

The Intelligence Report of April 1953 spelled out the tactics whereby the new Government could use the Labour Unions to create unrest and disturbances in the Colony when it would try to implement its immediate reform measures, "...to show concrete benefits and relief to the working classes and un-employed."<sup>94</sup> The Report stated: "It is in that event, with their wide control and support of Labour Unions, that we may expect internal unrest and disturbances in the Colony."<sup>95</sup>

The Report further drew attention to the PPP attacks made on Lionel Luckhoo, President of the MPCA, during the PPP's successful election campaign. It continued "... there can be no doubt that his reputation and popularity as a union leader has been greatly reduced and that it has all but cost him his political life for the period the PPP remains in power."<sup>96</sup> Governor Savage stated that the PPP had tried to dominate the British Guiana Trades Unions Council (BGTUC). There had also been discussions within the PPP about having it affiliated to the World Federation of Trades Unions (WFTU) the communist-dominated Organisation.<sup>97</sup> Governor Savage further drew attention to the difficulties certain trades unions were undergoing and to their future prospects. Of particular significance was the resignation of Herbert Critchlow from the British Guiana Labour Union. The Report stated, that Critchlow had offered his resignation because of "the growing influence of

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<sup>93</sup> Thirty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> Special Branch, "Intelligence Report for April, 1953". CO/1031/128. Op. Cit.. London. PRO. p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid..

<sup>96</sup> Special Branch, "Intelligence Report for April, 1953". CO/1031/128. Ibid., London, PRO. p.1.

<sup>97</sup> "Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana," Op. Cit., p. 3.

communist elements within its ranks.”<sup>98</sup>

On the Labour front, Governor Savage reported that there had been some indication of what to expect in the Government’s drive for union recognition. At one meeting, two prominent members of the House of Assembly, Messrs. Bowman and Adjodha Singh, had announced that the Party was preparing for a general strike in the sugar industry, “as a means to force the Sugar Producers’ Association to recognise the Guiana Industrial Workers’ Union.”<sup>99</sup> The push for recognition had not ceased; instead it had intensified with the resignation of Lionel Luckhoo.<sup>100</sup> In April 1953, Governor Savage reported that the success of the PPP at the polls on 27 April 1953, had been due to organisation of the PPP machinery, which had operated under the guidance of Janet Jagan and Forbes Burnham.<sup>101</sup> They had established party cells throughout the country, reaching out to the remote regions where other Parties had not dared to go. Regular meetings had been held to keep its members informed of what the Party was doing and to address the concerns of its members. Through regular contacts such as these, the Party had solidified its grip on communities and, over time, the PPP name had become a household word as the Party that cared. The Party had distributed literature that kept the people informed of its activities. Since the early 1950s, the PPP in Georgetown had begun holding private group meetings. The Report claimed that they had ‘gone underground.’<sup>102</sup>

The PPP’s organisational skills had proved very successful from the point of view that the Party name had become a household word and the people had identified the PPP cause with their

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<sup>98</sup> Presumably he was referring to the election of Forbes Burnham, a PPP member, as President of the Union. Governor Savage therefore expressed concern that the waterfront workers who were largely represented by BGLU could be cause for some anxiety.

<sup>99</sup> “Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Luckhoo was a prominent lawyer and businessman in the country. He was viewed by the PPP and the GIWU as a political enemy.

<sup>101</sup> “Intelligence Report for April 1953,” CO/1031/128. *Op. Cit.*. London. PRO. p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*.

cause. With good organisation, mobilisation of the masses had proved very successful. This was reportedly seen regularly during the short life of the PPP Government. The Government had mobilised people to try to force Governor Savage to make concessions or to change its position on several issues. The PPP had used various methods, among the most widely used were: demonstrations, strikes, and resistance campaigns.

With good organisation, mobilisation had followed easily. A strategy of the chief organisers was personal involvement. The PPP members participated in public demonstrations, marching, shouting, carrying placards as the common people were doing. This show of solidarity by the Party members and Ministers had rallied the people to the PPP cause. Janet Jagan, for example, had actively participated in the demonstrations carrying a placard. Another example was Westmaas, whom Governor Savage described as “one of the most vociferous boozers, easily recognisable by his unkempt beard, who shouted out at me ‘Limey, go home!’” For Governor Savage these incidents served as good examples “of the PPP method of taking advantage of any and every subject of discontent.”<sup>103</sup> These tactics were clearly meant, inter alia, to intimidate with the aim of forcing the Colonial Governor to change his position.

An instance cited by Governor Savage was the mobilisation against the proposed creation by the Colonial authorities of the Rice Development Corporation (RDC). Their ‘own’ association—the Rice Producers Association (RPA), already represented the farmers.<sup>104</sup> The PPP did not want a rival representative to take control of this industry and brought its demonstration force onto the streets.<sup>105</sup> The PPP considered any Colonial Organisation as being an illegal body. In short, the PPP was not prepared to tolerate competition and therefore fought to eliminate it. On the day that the subject was

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<sup>103</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*, p. 3. As reported by Governor Savage, one of the placards, rather inconsistently with the Party’s advocacy of nationalisation, displayed the slogan “Down with state capitalism.”

<sup>104</sup> The rice farmers were already represented by their ‘own’ association – the Rice Producers Association (RPA). The PPP did not want a rival association to take control of this industry.

<sup>105</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana.” *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

discussed in the Legislature, the PPP had the chamber packed with its supporters, referred to as “sandwich men” in Governor Savage’s Report,<sup>106</sup> waving placards bearing various anti-Government and anti-Colonial Development Corporation slogans.<sup>107</sup> A similar scene took place in the streets in the vicinity of the Parliament Building. Governor Savage considered this as mass mobilisation and intimidation by the PPP. By the PPP’s actions, he concluded, they had made it clear that they did not want a rival organisation to represent the rice farmers. The PPP efforts proved successful when the Colonial Administration decided to drop its proposal for the RDC.

As the strength of the Party increased, it forged a presence in the agriculture sector and other areas. These included the professional class, the Church and the youth of the country. By August 1953, Sidney King was said to be under the influence of Janet Jagan and was busy on the national scene, organising the Pioneer Youth League. He attacked the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Girls Guides Organisations (GGO).<sup>108</sup> By seeking to discredit the YMCA and the GGO he hoped that the members would join the Pioneer Youth League.<sup>109</sup> Governor Savage concluded that the Party was trying to attract the youth of the country for early training and indoctrination. He reported that there was growing unease in the country among the business community and the local European section of the population who were said to be willing to support Governor Savage to “repair the damage which has been done”.<sup>110</sup> Governor Savage, in a meeting with the leading businessmen in British Guiana, had pressed the problem on them and the part that they could play in arresting the deterioration of the situation. However, he felt “that some of them, supported particularly by the Portuguese community, consider the best solution is to hasten the

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<sup>106</sup> “Forty-Second Political Report on British Guiana.” *Op. Cit.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> These two organisations had been created on the British models.

<sup>109</sup> “Forty-Ninth Political Report on British Guiana,” *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>110</sup> “Fiftieth Political Report on British Guiana,” 1-31 August 1953. CO/1031/128. *Op. Cit.* London. PRO. What Governor Savage had hoped for was not a breakdown of the Constitution but development of an effective and energetic opposition party. p. 3.

breakdown of the constitution and to press Her Majesty's Government to go back to a less liberal system."<sup>111</sup>

The European civilian community, small in number proportionally, also recognised a communist threat in British Guiana. A Mrs. Elizabeth K. Hobbs wrote a letter to Prime Minister Churchill expressing "shock" over the Colonial Office's denial that it did not know of Cheddi Jagan's communist sympathies or his connections with Communism.<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Hobbs continued, "...we have known for several years that he was one and that his wife, an American and a near relative of the Rosenbergs, had belonged to the Communist Party..." Elizabeth Hobbs further stated that she provided newspaper clippings to substantiate her claims.<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Hobbs, writing in August 1953, stated, "...freedom from fear has gone and all responsible and thinking people from Heads of Departments downwards are depressed and worried, no matter what their nationality or race..."<sup>114</sup> The local Press, notably the *Daily Press* and the *Argosy* adopted a generally provocative attitude to the Ministers, belittling and ridiculing their efforts and emphasising their shortcomings.<sup>115</sup> The actions of PPP members did nothing to dispel the fears and mistrust of the business community and other sectors. On 2 August the Pioneer Youth League organised a week of demonstration at the Town Hall in Georgetown. PPP Ministers all participated and it was reported that they displayed "provocative" placards.<sup>116</sup> Inflammatory speeches were made at several meetings in other parts of the country.

PPP hostility to the USA was also of concern to Governor Savage, as we shall see next.

#### e. Hostility to the USA

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<sup>111</sup> Governor Savage's Letter of 13 September 1953 to Lloyd. CO/1031/121; File: A/748/121, 14 Sept, 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>112</sup> Mrs. Hobbs' personal letter to Churchill. CO/1031/119; File: A/485/7, 12 Sept. 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*. No newspaper clippings were found with her letter during my research at Public Records Office.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>115</sup> "Fiftieth Political Report on British Guiana," *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> Placards bore the portrait of Stalin and slogans such as "limey go home," to mention but a few.

Governor Savage felt that the PPP also expressed hostility at their (UK) ally, the USA. In June 1953, during a debate in the House on measures that the Government needed to take to assure foreign investors, Governor Savage reported that Sidney King had delivered an attack on the United States and had condemned its "imperialism." Governor Savage was aware of United States' business and security interests in British Guiana. The United States had signed a Military Bases Agreement with Britain on 24 February 1948. British Guiana, situated at the extreme north of South America was in the security sphere of the United States. The United States and Britain had a history of cooperating with each other on a range of issues deemed important and crucial to their interests. Communist intrigues in British Guiana were naturally of concern to the USA.

In June 1953, American investors, Roger Gilbert, President of the Panhandle Oil Corporation, and Dean Frasche of the Union Carbide Company visited British Guiana to explore the political situation prevailing in the country and the future prospects of US investments in the country. Other businesses such as the Harvey Metals Corporation were interested in developing the Bauxite industry.<sup>117</sup> In Governor Savage's opinion the PPP Government did not provide the assurances necessary to attract foreign investors into the country.<sup>118</sup> Of particular interest to investors was the Government's policy on taxation. Governor Savage opined: 'in the present circumstances there is not much that can be said to reassure them and they will in any case doubtless hold their hands until the new Government has given a firmer and clearer indication of its policy particularly in regard to taxation.' By July 1953, the Government was talking about nationalising the bauxite industry, the Banks and the Insurance Companies. The prospect did not bode well for free trade in a post-colonial Guiana.

How was all of this viewed in London? We shall see this next.

## 6. The Communist Threat as seen in London

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<sup>117</sup> Harvey Metals Corp. was considering the establishment of a bauxite processing plant in British Guiana. But in light of the uncertainty and anxiety in the country the project was abandoned.

<sup>118</sup> "Forty-eighth Political Report on British Guiana," *Op. Cit.*.

In light of the foregoing, by the end of September 1953, the British Government had concluded that there was a serious communist threat in British Guiana. A “top secret” memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies was presented to the Cabinet of the British Government on 30 September 1953, and left no doubt that the British Government sought to check a perceived communist threat in British Guiana. The memorandum is worth dwelling upon at some length for it is highly instructive on this point. The Secretary of State pointed out that the new constitution introduced in British Guiana in April 1953, conferring adult suffrage, an elected House of Assembly and elected Ministers, “had to be honoured by his government for “[a]lthough formally introduced by the present Government, we were already committed to it by the previous Government.”<sup>119</sup>

Similar constitutions had been granted to Jamaica (1944) and Trinidad (1950). Since the Government had accepted the proposals of an independent commission “[a]ny attempt to postpone a similar step for British Guiana in the circumstances would have had a very bad effect in British Guiana and the rest of the West Indies and I felt that I should not go back on the late Government’s decision .”<sup>120</sup> Secretary of State for the Colonies noted, however, that at the elections at the end of April “the only organised party in the colony, which was dominated by Communists, gained eighteen out of twenty four seats in the House of Assembly. Since last April British Guiana has had elected Ministers who are under strong Communist influences.”<sup>121</sup> The Secretary of State for the Colonies’ acceptance of the verdict of the electorate, “despite the risks involved,” was undertaken “in the hope that Governor Savage by tact and patience could win the Ministers away from the extremists in the party and that the responsibilities of office would modify their views.” To his dismay, it [became] clear...that the Ministers have no intention of working the present constitution in a democratic manner nor have they any real interest in the good of the people of British Guiana. He then stated:

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<sup>119</sup> Memorandum of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 September, 1953. CAB 129/63: C(53) 261. London. PRO.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid..

<sup>121</sup> Ibid..

“They have taken every opportunity to undermine the constitution and to further the communist cause. Typical of their actions has been the withdrawal of the ban on the entry of West Indian Communists, the moving of legislation to repeal the Subversive Literature Ordinance, the refusal to move a loyal address to Her Majesty on the first meeting of the House of Assembly or to send a delegation from the House to meet Her Majesty in Jamaica...

They have been the moving force behind the strike which has paralysed the sugar industry of the territory for the past four weeks and which at one time showed signs of spreading to the whole country. Their actions have completely destroyed the confidence of the business community and all moderate opinion and the economy of the territory is well on the way to ruin. Their sole aim appears to be complete totalitarian dominance of the territory that they are seeking to achieve by the classical Communist technique of penetrating trades unions and local Government. Their leading figures are in close touch with the World Federation of Trade Unions in Vienna.”<sup>122</sup>

In light of the above assessment the Secretary of State for the Colonies concluded:

“I have no doubt that a halt must be called and that we must take away the Ministers’ powers, imprison the extremists and suspend the Constitution at the earliest possible moment. I propose to advise Her Majesty to make the necessary Orders in Council. Troops and emergency legal powers will be needed and may take some fourteen days to arrange. I am concerting the necessary arrangements with Governor Savage”.<sup>123</sup>

At the Cabinet meeting of 30 September 1953, British Guiana was the subject of serious discussion.

From the minutes of that meeting, it is quite clear that the British Government had serious concerns about the PPP Ministers. It was stated at this meeting the PPP was dominated by communists.<sup>124</sup> On 2 October 1953, the Cabinet approved the Colonial Secretary’s proposals.<sup>125</sup>

In preparation for the official announcement of the suspension of the Constitution in British Guiana, the Colonial Office put the blame on the communist elements in the Party for the state of affairs in the colony:

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<sup>122</sup> Oliver Lyttleton’s Memorandum, 25 Sept., 1953. Op. Cit.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Memorandum by the Secretary of State of the Colonies, Oliver Lyttleton, 25th September, 1953. Doc: C (53)261). File: A/53/261. London. PRO.

<sup>125</sup> Cabinet decision on the constitutional crisis, 2 Oct 1953. CAB 128/26/2; CC 54(53)4. File CAB/27 Sept. 1953. London. PRO.



“Her Majesty’s Government and I were well aware that some of these Ministers had extreme left wing sympathies. We knew that two of them had paid visits to communist countries in Europe...”<sup>126</sup>

“I have to now tell you that these Ministers have failed utterly to live up to their responsibilities and, regardless of your welfare, have devoted all their energies to perverting the Constitution for their own extremist ends...”<sup>127</sup>

Colonial Office officials blamed the leaders of the PPP for the breakdown of the constitution. They stated:

“The leaders of the PPP have openly strengthened their links with communist countries and have boasted of the preference for the Russian way of life.... The colony is being flooded with communist propaganda. The very organisation of the PPP itself is being modeled on communist lines with cells for recruitment, indoctrination, political agitation and the maintenance of rigorous discipline.”<sup>128</sup>

“In the interest of the people of British Guiana this must stop. I have, therefore, ..to take away Ministers’ portfolios and to take over full control of the Government  
.....<sup>129</sup>

“The damage which this communist plot has done to the economic and social life of the community must be repaired as quickly as possible.”<sup>130</sup>

Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, explained to Parliament on 9 October 1953 the Government’s reasons for suspending the British Guiana Constitution.<sup>131</sup> The British Government, he said, had concluded that there was a communist threat posed by the PPP in British Guiana.

In his report to the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for the Colonies charged the following against the PPP: (i) Fomenting of strikes for political ends... (ii) Attempting to oust established trade unions by legislative action; (iii) Removal of the ban on the entry of West Indian communists... (iv) Introduction of a bill to repeal the Undesirable Publications Ordinance and the flooding of the territory with communist literature...(v) Misuse of rights of appointment to Boards

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<sup>126</sup> Telegram from Oliver Lyttleton to Governor Savage. 4 Oct. 53. CO/1031/1179. File: A/34510. 5 Oct. 1953. London. PRO. para. 6.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 5.

<sup>128</sup> Telegram from Oliver Lyttleton to Governor Savage. 4 Oct. 53. CO/1031/1179. File: A/34510, 5 Oct. 1953. London. PRO. para. 6.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, para., 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, para., 16.

<sup>131</sup> Parliament’s discussions and decision to remove the PPP from Office is expressed by Colonial Officer, J.W. Vernon to Governor Savage. CO/1031/119; File: A/34508, 16 and 24 Sept. 1953. London PRO. See Also CAB 129/63, C(53)261. Cabinet memo by Lyttleton on the constitutional crisis, 30 Sept. 1953. and CAB 128/26/2, CC

and Committees... (vi) Spreading of racial hatred... (vii) Planning to secularise Church schools and to rewrite textbooks to give them a political bias... (viii) Neglect of their administrative duties... (ix) Undermining of the loyalty of the Police... (x) Attempts to gain control of the Public Service; (xi) Threats of violence...<sup>132</sup>

How did the PPP reply to these charges? We look at this next.

## 7. The PPP Reply to the Charges Against It

In a strong reply published in the Labour Monthly of November 1953,<sup>133</sup> Janet Jagan refuted the charges against the PPP. She strongly denied that there was a communist plot to create disorder and to overthrow the government. The PPP, she argued, had done little else in its brief period in office than attempt to implement its election manifesto of April 1953, which had stated:

“We intend to amend all existing laws and regulations which restrict the civil liberties of the people such as banning of individuals, books and films;

We shall introduce laws making it a crime to discriminate against any person or persons on account of race or religion;

We shall guarantee freedom of press, worship, speech, assembly and association as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The PPP, she said:

“had passed a bill to repeal a fascist law prohibiting import of and distribution of progressive literature. It had opened doors to everyone by lifting certain bans. It had passed legislation that was aimed at forcing employers to recognize for collective bargaining trade unions with majority support. It had increased loans to farmers...

“It had passed an amendment to help farmers during drought. It had campaigned to remove church control of schools. It had tightened up on public work expenditure. It had curtailed house building for senior government officials. It had begun a revision of fees of Government doctors to help the poor. It had initiated legislation to reform local government by introducing adult suffrage. It had advocated jobs for local men in the police force...”

“The PPP tremendous growth of strength and confidence from the Guianese had frightened the UK officials, who saw their power waning.”

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54(53)4, 2 Oct, Cabinet conclusions on same. See Ashton and Killingray (eds): British Documents on the End of Empire: The West Indies. London: The London Stationary Office. pp. 54-65.

<sup>132</sup> *Report on British Guiana: Suspension of the Constitution*. 9 Oct. 1953. London, HMSO. Cmnd. 8980.

<sup>133</sup> J. Jagan, “British Guiana – Our Case,” Labour Monthly. Nov. 1953, pp. 495-498.

No evidence whatsoever, she underlined, had been produced of a communist plot:

“Talk of a communist coup and uprisings is more fantastic than Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. Not one of the party leaders had gone so far as to even a hint of guns and bombs. What need was there for terrorism when we were sailing smoothly and constitutional changes were fast approaching? Communism was made the bogey to re-establish the old order of graft, corruption, favouritism and soft jobs for civil servants deposed from India and Palestine.”

In the situation that we have presented above, how did the British and American governments come together to respond to it? This aspect is discussed below.

## 8. Anglo-American Co-operation

The United States followed events in British Guiana intently. In the early 1950s the Cold War was intensifying and “extremist behaviour” was being closely monitored by the US, particularly those taking place within its sphere of influence. British Guiana lay in the strategic zone of the United States, in the gateway to the Panama Canal. It was the only English-speaking country on the South American continent; therefore US reaction to communist intrigues must be seen in this light.

On the economic side, there were several US companies in British Guiana mining bauxite, gold and other important minerals.<sup>134</sup> Bauxite was an important commodity for the US arms and aircraft industries and British Guiana was producing more than half of the world’s supply, hence the importance of British Guiana. Harvey’s Metal Corporation, which was actually mining bauxite in 1953 in British Guiana, had been interested in extending its business to processing of the mineral in the country. Other American investors such as the Panhandle Oil Corporation and Union Carbide Company had visited the country in June 1953 and held talks with Governor Savage to explore the possibilities of further developing the country’s resources.

Evidence of American interest could be seen allegedly on 17 July 1951, when Mr. N.L. Mayle of the Colonial Office had written to the Foreign Office enclosing a copy of some

questionnaires sent directly by the United States Vice Consul to the British Guiana Police requesting information about individual members of the British Guiana Legislative Council. The British Authorities had not appreciated the direct approach to the local police and the Acting Governor had explained to him that the British Authorities could not cooperate in the completion of the questionnaires. However, on 31 July 1951, Mr. R. Cecil of the Foreign Office, while recognising that the Vice Consul had erred in his direct approach to the police, advised against discouraging "the tendencies of the United States Authorities to take us into their confidence..."<sup>135</sup>

In 1951, Serafino Romualdi, an American 'labour Ambassador', had identified a communist threat posed by Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana. In his memoirs<sup>136</sup> he acknowledged his role in organising resistance to block it. It is now common knowledge that the AFL-CIO and its affiliates worked closely with the United States Government. In 1952, Romualdi<sup>137</sup> returned to British Guiana. Governor Woolley reported that, during his stay, Romualdi visited the sugar estates and that he had taken an active role in monitoring the elections of members to the Estates Joint Committees.<sup>138</sup> The US was supportive of Governor Savage's aim to create a stable environment in British Guiana so as to attract potential investors. Governor Savage had in mind potential American investors. Governor Savage reported in June 1953 that he had taken the initiative and had invited American Consul General Maddox<sup>139</sup> who was based in Trinidad, to visit British Guiana. He had arranged for Maddox to meet with the Ministers for discussions and even had the Consul attend a session of the House of Assembly. Governor Savage was conscious that the United States had interests in the colony and also had the means to develop it.

In the same vein, a memorandum dated 16 September 1953 from James Vernon, at the Colonial Office, London, to A. Campbell at the British Embassy, Washington stated: "For reasons

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<sup>134</sup> Iron ore and oil were discovered on the borders of British Guiana and Venezuela.

<sup>135</sup> Cecil's letter of 31 July 1951 to Mayle. CO/1031/128. File: A255/10, 1 August 1951. London. PRO.

<sup>136</sup> S. Romualdi. *Presidents and Peons, Recollections of a Labor Ambassador*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967. pp. 345-346.

<sup>137</sup> He was a representative of the AFL, Washington.

<sup>138</sup> Governor Woolley, "Political Report for June 1952." CO/1031/128. File: A255/10, 1 Aug. 1952. London. PRO.

<sup>139</sup> p. 2.  
"Forty-Eighth Political Report for June 1953." *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

you will appreciate we have been very interested in the reaction in the United States to political developments in British Guiana. We have seen reports that the State Department was showing considerable interest in the results of the elections and in subsequent development but this news reaches us rather sporadically. Would it be possible for you to arrange for us to be supplied with cuttings from the American press on this subject if you consider them to be of sufficient interest? If you have the time it would also be useful to have your own assessment of American views on British Guiana from time to time.”<sup>140</sup>

On 24 August 1953, Howard Smith sent a confidential letter (15105/6/53) to the American Department at the Foreign Office about the political situation in British Guiana and asked that the British Authorities in the colony advise the Venezuelan Government about the question of frontier control. On 28 September 1953, the Chief Secretary, John Gutch, wrote to the Chancery of the British Embassy in Caracas in the following terms:

“...As for the political situation...it appears to be deteriorating rapidly and if the elected Ministers persist in their present intransigent and extremist attitude, we can regard it as only a matter of time before there is a breakdown in the Constitution. Should this occur, all necessary steps would be taken to meet the situation and to restore stable Government to the country. This would presumably allay the fears of the Venezuelan Government.”<sup>141</sup>

Following the British suspension of British Guiana's constitution the United States Government commended British action. The American news media hailed the US reaction in positive terms citing US concerns of communist infiltration in the colony, US interests in the colony and in the Caribbean at large.<sup>142</sup> Support for the UK government action came from US Congressman Jackson, who had visited British Guiana in September 1953 (a month before the

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<sup>140</sup> J. Vernon's note of 16 September 1953 to Campbell, British Embassy, Washington. CO:1031/120. File: A/345-20. 16 Sept. 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>141</sup> J. Gutch's letter of 28 September, 1953 to the Chancery, British Embassy, Caracas. No. S. 63/35. CO/1031/1189. A/345//1. 31 Sept. 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>142</sup> Among these were: The New York Times, 10 Oct. 1953; The Herald Tribune, 10 Oct. 1953; The Washington Post, 11 Oct. 1953 and The Daily Mail, 10 Sept. 1953.

suspension of the constitution). He noted that "...British Guiana was within the strategic zone of the United States..."<sup>143</sup>

A telegram dated 14 October 1953, from the British Ambassador, Washington stated :

"...At our request, United States posts in Latin-American countries have been instructed to use their influence to ensure that our action in British Guiana is favourably received by Latin-American governments and people...

" They have given considerable assistance..."<sup>144</sup>

On 23 October 1953, UK Ambassador Sir Roger Makins reported from Washington to the Foreign Office that the United States State Department was disturbed to learn that ex-Minister Jai Narine Singh was about to make a speaking tour of the Latin American Republics. They understood that he spoke Spanish "and has a smooth and plausible manner"; and they feared that his tour would do much to nullify their efforts to convince Latin American Governments and publics of the reality of the Communist threat in British Guiana."<sup>145</sup>

The telegram continued:

"...The United States Government does not wish to suggest formally that Jai Narine Singh should be detained, or otherwise prevented from making this trip. But the Deputy Assistant Secretary concerned made it clear to members of my staff that if Jai Narine Singh is allowed to carry out his plan, United States efforts to help us over Guiana in Latin America will be discouraged."<sup>146</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a background into the Constitutional development of British Guiana up to 1953; to summarise the vision of the British Government for the colony in

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<sup>143</sup> The Baltimore Sun's editorial of 11 October 1953 was titled "American-British Unity Against British Guiana Communism." This Newspaper emphasised the same concern that British Guiana was too near vital areas and key sea lanes for the American countries and the Western Alliance to see communist manipulations there with any comfort. It praised British action and echoed US support. Jackson had been a guest of Governor Governor Savage during his stay in British Guiana.

<sup>144</sup> Telegram from the British Ambassador, Washington to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. 14 October 1953. Secret. #25. CO/1031/1189. File: A/345/102. 15 Oct. 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>145</sup> Memorandum from Washington to the Foreign Office, dated 23 October 1953. No. 2283. CO/1031/128. File: A/345/08. London. PRO.

<sup>146</sup> Op. Cit., in Note 144.

1953; to present in their own words the aspirations of the PPP leadership in 1953; to set out the actions of the PPP while in office for 133 days in 1953; to summarise Governor Savage's assessment of PPP actions in the context of the Cold War; to summarise how the British Government in London assessed the situation in deciding to suspend the Constitution on 9 October 1953 and gave the reply of the PPP in the words of its staunchest spokesperson, Janet Jagan. We have let the historical materials speak largely for themselves.

At the conclusion of this survey of the materials we would offer the following concluding observations:

The period in question was the beginning of, and an intensive period of, the Cold War. The actions of both sides must be viewed in this context. The USA and the USSR were in a struggle for supremacy. Each co-opted the states in its own region in the struggle and permitted no deviation from within.

The actions of PPP leaders were simultaneously nationalistic, moved by a genuine desire to improve the living conditions of Guianese within the stream of the decolonisation movement; immature and provocative, sometimes even reckless; and often lacking in judgement about the sensitivities of the Western powers in Communist ideology.

The evidence advanced by Governor Savage hardly substantiates a real communist threat. They were for the most part blown up out of proportions. Nevertheless, the fact is that the West and East were engaged in a life and death struggle over values, power and influence. The local leaders basically chose the communist side.

Both sides seemed to have been caught in the trap of Cold War history.

**CHAPTER 4**

**BRITISH GUIANA: THE FIRST COMMUNIST STATE IN SOUTH  
AMERICA?**

**AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, 1953**



## 1. Introduction

Having considered the British perspectives on the Communist threat in British Guiana in 1953, we now turn to its partner on the other side of the Atlantic, the United States of America. Influential American Officials reported that British Guiana was emerging into the first Communist state in South America were given in the press and warnings. Newspaper articles in the United States, statements by United States Congressional leaders, and statements by senior US State Department Officials all voiced fears about a Communist threat in British Guiana.

These fears were buttressed by developments in the Guianese press. As the political crisis developed in British Guiana between April 1953 and October 1953, the local newspapers were full of stories about the communist threat allegedly posed by the PPP. As we saw earlier, even before the elections were held on 27 April, 1953, the Man Power Citizen Association (MPCA) ran a multi-page Supplement to the Daily Chronicle on 19 April 1953, which stated bluntly, "When you vote for the PPP you vote for the Communists."<sup>1</sup> On election day, 27 April, 1953, the Daily Chronicle reproduced an article by US journalist, Donald McCormick with the caption, "Woman leads red threat in B.G."<sup>2</sup> It stated: "If blonde American-born sari-wearing Mrs. Janet Jagan gets her way, there will in a few weeks be a Communist majority in a British Colonial Government for the first time in history."<sup>3</sup> There were numerous articles in the British Guiana newspapers calling upon the PPP to deny that it was communist and various sidestepping answers by Cheddi and Janet Jagan. On June 10, 1953, the Daily Chronicle reported: "To the direct question whether her husband, Cheddi Jagan and herself are Communists, Janet Jagan replied, 'No comment'." All of this surely came to the attention of the United States.

As will be seen below, on 7 October, 1953, two days before the British Government suspended British Guiana's Constitution, the United States National Security Council (NSC) met

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<sup>1</sup> Article by the MPCA, "When you vote for the PPP you vote for the Communists." British Guiana Elections Supplement. April-December 1953. The Daily Chronicle. 19 April 1953, p. 1. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>2</sup> D. McCormick, "Woman leads red threat in B.G." Reproduced in the Daily Chronicle. 27 April 1953. p.1. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid..

under the Chairmanship of President Eisenhower and heard a report from CIA Director, Allen Dulles, that a major communist threat existed in British Guiana. There were media suggestions that in suspending the British Guiana constitution the British had acted following pressure from the United States, a charge that British Colonial Secretary of State Lyttleton denied. Nevertheless, the US Consul-General covering Guiana, Maddox, did acknowledge at the time that consultations between the British and American Administrations were a regular part of their cooperation on such matters. A few days before the British Government suspended British Guiana's Constitution there was a newspaper report that the Americans had been considering dispatching troops and re-occupying Atkinson Field.<sup>4</sup> However, US Consul-General Maddox denied this. Following the suspension of the Constitution Maddox said publicly that a major communist threat had been put down in British Guiana.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter we shall look at the policy of Truman and Eisenhower Administrations on Latin America and the Caribbean; political developments in British Guiana; American fears of a communist danger in British Guiana and reactions to those fears.

## **2. The Truman Administration**

### **a. The Latin American and Caribbean Region**

In 1948, as we have seen earlier, the Truman Administration decided in NSC16, the first NSC document dealing exclusively with Latin America, that "communism in the Americas is a potential danger but that with few possible exceptions it is not seriously dangerous at the present time."<sup>6</sup> In September 1953, Assistant Secretary of State Cabot, answering an NSC inquiry about communism in the hemisphere, replied that the major source of friction in inter-American relations was not the machinations of the Soviet Administration but rather the intense resentment Latin Americans felt about the absence of a Marshall Plan for them. He told the NSC that Latin

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<sup>4</sup> Atkinson Field, the national airport region in British Guiana where the United States had had a 99-year lease since 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Maddox's Report of Oct. 9, 1953 to DOS. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>6</sup> S. Rabe, "Dulles, Latin America, and Cold War Anti-communism", in Richard Immerman, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1990. p.173.

Americans, including political radicals, were absorbed with domestic, not international problems and that “many of them are essentially native communists.”<sup>7</sup>

How did this relate to British Guiana? We shall look briefly at this next.

#### **b. British Guiana**

The United States Government followed the unfolding situation in British Guiana closely.<sup>8</sup> Reports from American Consuls in British Guiana between 1947 and 1952 dealt, among other subjects, with the following issues (i) the political awakening in British Guiana; (ii) the emergence of a communist threat; (iii) communist propaganda and tactics; and (iv) political protests (1952). We shall look at each of these issues in turn.

##### **i) Reports on the Political Awakening in British Guiana (1947)**

By the time of the Legislative Elections in British Guiana on 29 December 1947, the American Vice-Consul in Georgetown, George W. Skora, had prepared and sent a lengthy summary to the Department of State on the “Legislative Council Elections and Appointments in British Guiana.”<sup>9</sup> The Vice-Consul reported thus on Cheddi Jagan: “Independent Labor. Dentist. Husband of Mrs. Cheddi Jagan, defeated candidate for Legislative Council. Educated in the United States. Is not believed to be anti-American.”<sup>10</sup> Cheddi Jagan, according to Skora, had stated in his electoral campaign that he would pursue the following goals in the Legislative Council: (a) elimination of appointed seats in the Legislative Council; (b) universal adult suffrage and introduction of the recall system; (c) forty-hour week employment without reduction in salaries; (d) better facilities for vocational and technical training, slum clearance; (e) school of nursing and health insurance scheme; (f) increased taxes on export of raw products; (g) subsidisation of essential foodstuffs; (h)

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<sup>7</sup> Cabot to NSC, 9 September 1953. Ref. # DSRG 59,611.20/9/1953 in S. Rabe: *Op. Cit.*, p. 173

<sup>8</sup> These letters sent to Truman, addressed various issues ranging from US immigration policies toward coloured Guianese in the USA, requests for photographs of the President, and the strict monetary controls that existed in British Guiana in the 1950s. Independence, Missouri. Truman Library.

<sup>9</sup> Skora's Report to DOS: “Legislative Council Elections and Appointments in British Guiana.” 29 Dec. 1947, DOS decimal files, 1945 - 1950. RG 59. Box 6048. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*.

more efficient and economical drainage and irrigation; and (i) guaranteed prices for agricultural produce".<sup>11</sup>

Skora's assessment would change rapidly toward one of a communist threat, as we shall see below.

### ii) The Emergence of a Communist Threat (1948)

Six months later, in his Report of July 8, 1948 to the Department of State, Skora wrote about a rapid growth of Communism in the colony..." He mentioned Cheddi and Janet Jagan as "Probably the most important of the communist leaders locally."<sup>12</sup> In addition to the Jagans, he cited others as well: "...Among fellow travellers are M.B. Khan, Amos Rangela, Jenaraine Singh,..., C.R. Jacob, ... and possibly ... Hon D.P. Debidin..."<sup>13</sup> Among the reasons for the growth of communism in British Guiana he noted: "... the neglect of the working classes of British Guiana following the end of World War II." He mentioned "the hopes of the people for a better life at the end of the War; the restrictions imposed by Britain on the colony in the Post World War II period due to her weakness..."<sup>14</sup> For Skora,

"The time was ripe, as it always seems to be when a combination of circumstances renders the working classes gullible for the shining promises of Communists, and they ranged up and down the sugar and rice estates of the Guiana coastlands, ranting and screaming about oppression of workers, promising the ignorant estate laborers the sun, the moon, and stars..."

"They had remained more or less under cover until conditions favoured them, but here they were out in the open. Same pattern which has characterised fellow travellers in Europe, China, India, South America and elsewhere..."<sup>15</sup>

The tactics used by the "communist leaders", he further stated, were aimed at confusing, dividing the workers into factions, pitting them one against the other, and substituting unreasoning and blind hostility for peaceful negotiation and logic.<sup>16</sup>

### iii) Communistic Propaganda and Tactics, (1949-1951)

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<sup>11</sup> Skora's Report to DOS. Op. Cit., t fn. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Skora's Report: "Certain Comments on the Growth of Communism in the Colony of British Guiana." July 8, 1948. DOS decimal files 1945-49. RG 59. Box 6048. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. The Vice Consul drew the Dept. of State's attention to the conditions prevailing in British Guiana in 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

On 18 July 1949, Consul Eugene H. Johnson sent a Report entitled "Communitic Propaganda" drawing attention to the contents of the PAC Bulletin on June 30, 1949.<sup>17</sup> On February 10, 1950, Johnson informed the Department of State that the local press, on 10 January 1950, had reported that since the beginning of the year, there had been preliminary moves to form a People's Progressive Party along the lines of the People's National Party of Jamaica and that "Dr. C. Jagan was likely to be one of the key figures in the moves."<sup>18</sup> He noted then that, "the party is unlikely to veer to the extreme left but half-way left of center."<sup>19</sup> Consul Johnson immediately sought and obtained an interview with Cheddi Jagan, but reported that despite his efforts, he did not get any new information.<sup>20</sup> In April, he reported on 'The Platform of the People's Progressive Party' (which he had already outlined on in his Report of 10 Feb, 1950). It included: (a) representation of every trade union in the colony; (b) to educate the people of the colony as to their political rights, and (c) to educate the people about the need for constitutional reforms."<sup>21</sup>

The PPP Government and its activities had aroused a great deal of interest for the Truman Administration's Department of State. In addition to sending 5 copies of Thunder on 8 May 1950 to the Department of State, Consul Johnson explained that through Thunder the PPP kept in close touch with its supporters, informing them what the Government had been doing. The Department of State had been very interested to learn of the PPP's thinking, its policies and future plans for the colony and, importantly, what information the PPP had been disseminating to the people on the United States Government's attitude towards British Guiana. One report noted that on 7 July 1951, Thunder had published an article, "Attack on Civil Liberties."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> DOS Decimal Files, 1945/49. RG59. Box 6048. US National Archives. Note: Despatch #29 of 18 July 1949 was not been found among the decimal files for 1945-1949, Box 6048 nor in any other boxes at the Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Report of Consul Johnson, "Formation of New Political Party." Georgetown, British Guiana." 10 February 1950. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson had sent the first publication of the PPP organ Thunder on 10 Feb. 1950 along with the Consul's regular Report.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, 's Report, "Formation of New Political Party." Dispatch #31. 10 February, 1950. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid..

<sup>22</sup> Thunder, Vol. 2, No. 7, July 1951. Referred to in Burke's Report of 2 August, 1951.

On 30 July, 1951, Janet Jagan had written the American Vice Consul, Georgetown, as follows: "Dear Sir, We are no longer in receipt of the material for publication which you previously sent us. We shall be glad if you would resume sending such material to us. Yours sincerely. (Sgd.)

Janet Jagan, Editor, Thunder.<sup>23</sup> In referring this to the Department of State, Vice Consul T.E. Burke commented:

It is thought that there might be a possibility that the aforementioned Party has requested American information in an effort to ascertain how much American information is being distributed in this Colony. It is thought that Dr Cheddi Jagan, husband of the writer of this letter and Member of the Legislative Council of British Guiana, as well as leader of the People's Progressive Party, might be attempting to obtain information on the distribution of American news in this Colony in order to aid him and his party in their fight for importing and distributing communistic literature...

In view of the above, the Department is requested to study this matter and issue an advisory opinion."<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Burke opined that the "free exchange of information and ideas should be encouraged whenever and wherever possible..." and suggested that a limited amount of "strictly cultural and educational material" could be provided.<sup>25</sup>

#### iv. Political protests (1952)

Burke reported on 5 May 1952 about PPP accusations against the Government of the United States during its 'May Day Celebrations.' According to his report, a large crowd of PPP supporters of about 5,000 workers from Georgetown and the rural districts, representing the British Guiana Trades Union Council, had attended a rally on 1 May, 1952, to mark the official local observance of the generally recognised International Labour Day. Cheddi Jagan, member of the Legislative Council and "a leader of the People's Progressive Party which follows the Communistic

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<sup>23</sup> See attachment to Vice Consul's Letter of 2 Aug. 1953, dispatch 10, to Department of State: "Transmittal of letter from People's Progressive Party, Georgetown, requesting USIS material." Dept. of State Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box. 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. .

<sup>24</sup> Burke's Report, dispatch # 10, 2 August, 1951: "Transmittal of letter from People's Party, Georgetown, requesting USIS material". DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid..

line", marched outside of the entrance to Government House with slogan-bearing placards

"demanding Governor Woolley's recall...".<sup>26</sup> Burke further reported that,

The slogans carried by the PPP members before Government House are given hereunder: 'We don't want a Fascist Guiana'; 'Send Governor Woolley Home. PPP'; 'We protest Fascist banning of British subjects Strachan and Smith' (two Jamaicans recently denied entrance to Trinidad and British Guiana); 'We demand free movement of British subjects in British West Indies,' 'PPP demands Governor Woolley's recall'; 'We want to know the Fascist stooges in Executive Council who voted for banning of Smith and Strachan' (Ferdinand Smith, an alleged Communist, former national secretary of the United States National Maritime Union and William Strachan, secretary of the London branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress); 'PPP demands self-government now.'<sup>27</sup>

According to Burke, the PPP had even adopted some resolutions calling for the following actions to be taken:

"The cessation of the present trend of curtailment and encroachment upon the civil rights and liberties of the citizens of this country

"The early introduction of Universal Adult Suffrage as the basis for the Election in Local Authorities (Town Councils and Village Councils)

"The early adoption of measures to cushion the effect of the ever rising cost of living, and the introduction of schemes to stem the rising tide of unemployment."<sup>28</sup>

How would the Eisenhower Administration deal with such a situation? We look at this next against the background of its policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean

### 3. The Eisenhower Administration

The Eisenhower Administration, in the words of S. Dockrill, "Regarded the menace of Communism as a combination of military, political, psychological, and economic threats to the 'free world'. What particularly concerned Eisenhower was his realization that 'World Communism is taking advantage of that spirit of nationalism to cause dissension in the free world'. In response, the United States would take 'all feasible diplomatic, political, economic, and covert measures' to deal

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<sup>26</sup> Burke's Report: "May Day in British Guiana", May 5, 1952. Despatch #133. Maryland. US National Archives, p.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. The theme of "Civil Liberties" had been given prominence by the PPP as it had felt that the denial of freedom of movement had applied to certain persons who had been considered important to the success of PPP.

with these Soviet Communist challenges.”<sup>29</sup> President Eisenhower’s ‘new-look’ national security policy sought to regain the initiative in the Cold War using all the strengths of the United States, military means, covert operations, foreign military aid, the armed forces of its allies and Cold War diplomacy. As Dockrill has put it “the idea of gaining ‘the initiative’ by selective and flexible responses implied an offensive rather than a defensive posture on the part of the United States.”<sup>30</sup>

#### **a. Latin American and Caribbean Region**

By the early 1950s, the Cold War had reached new heights of tension. The United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in struggles in other regions. Closer to home, the Eisenhower Administration wanted to keep its hemisphere free from communist intrigues. It wanted Latin America to support the USA in the Cold War, to accept free trade and investment principles and to oppose communism. In the name of anti-communism, therefore, the Administration expanded the measures deemed permissible to protect US security.

In the Presidential campaign of 1952 candidate Eisenhower had criticised the Latin American policy of the Truman Administration and promised to change the hemispheric policies of the United States. During his confirmation hearings to become Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles took the position in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Soviet communism was “not only the gravest threat that ever faced the US, but the greatest threat that has ever faced Western civilization.”<sup>31</sup> Dulles saw in Latin America a well-organised communist movement and advocated that ‘the time to deal with this rising menace in South America is now.’<sup>32</sup>

The Eisenhower Administration discussed Inter-American relations on 18 February 1953. CIA Director, Allen Dulles reported that the Kremlin was exploiting deteriorating economic and

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<sup>29</sup> S. Dockrill, *Eisenhower’s New-Look national Security Policy, 1953-1961*, London: Macmillan Press, 1996, p.2

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3

<sup>31</sup> US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Nomination of John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State-Designate*. 83rd Cong., 1st session 1953, 10, 30-31. Cited in R. Immerman, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>32</sup> S. Rabe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 160.



political conditions in Latin America and warned of communist infection in Guatemala.<sup>33</sup> The Eisenhower Administration adopted a new policy for Latin America, NSC 144/1. It saw the United States' relations with Latin America within the context of the Soviet-American confrontation. The NSC staff study which was annexed to the NSC 144/1 concluded that "overriding security interests" required the US to consider acting unilaterally to combat the communist threat in Latin America.<sup>34</sup>

The Eisenhower Administration therefore put in place measures such as, public relations, propaganda, labour, military aid, and recognition policies to combat communism in Latin America. President Eisenhower sent his brother Milton<sup>35</sup> to Latin America as part of the American drive against communism. The US Information Agency (USIA) spent about US\$ 5.2 million per year producing anti-communist materials for distribution in Latin America. The Administration also opened an anti-communist radio station broadcasting from El Salvador.

The Eisenhower Administration's attack on communism was also waged on the trade union front. The Administration encouraged the development of the Inter-American Organisation of Workers. On the trade union front the Administration consulted and worked with the American Federation of Labour (AFL) and its President, George Meany.<sup>36</sup> The Eisenhower Administration also decided to increase its military aid to the region on the ground that the US needed the region's strategic materials and, in the words of President Eisenhower, "we can't defend South America if this communist war starts."<sup>37</sup> While the Eisenhower Administration declared its commitment to democracy and human rights, it clearly favoured governments that were on its side. Dulles is said to have believed that dictators were dependable allies of the US.<sup>38</sup>

Stephen Rabe has argued that during this period Soviet diplomacy and economic influence in Latin America were minimal. Until 1960 the Soviet Union had embassies only in Argentina,

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<sup>33</sup> Rabe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>35</sup> Milton Eisenhower was serving as his personal envoy to Latin America.

<sup>36</sup> Rabe, *Ibid.*, p.165. See generally G. Morris, *The CIA and American labour: The Subversion of the AFL-CIO's Foreign Policy*. New York: International Publishers, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> See Rabe, *Ibid.*, p. 165, fn. 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Mexico, and Uruguay, and little trade.<sup>39</sup> The Eisenhower Administration's anti-communist policy had led it to overthrow President Arbenz of Guatemala in June 1954.<sup>40</sup> At the Tenth Inter-American Conference in Caracas in March 1954 the US delegation, led by Secretary of State Dulles, had secured an anti-communist resolution which, in the words of Dulles, had extended the Monroe doctrine to include the concept of outlawing foreign ideologies in the American Republics.<sup>41</sup> After its success in Guatemala, the Eisenhower Administration had adopted NSC 5613/1 warning that "if a Latin American state should establish with the Soviet bloc close ties of such a nature as seriously to prejudice our vital interests" the United States would "be prepared to diminish governmental, economic, and financial cooperation with that country and take any other political, economic, or military action deemed appropriate."<sup>42</sup>

Against this background of American policy toward Latin America, we turn to the situation of British Guiana, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean, Venezuela, Brazil and Dutch Guiana (now Suriname).

#### **b. British Guiana**

It may be noted by way of background information that a US Consulate had operated in British Guiana prior to 1952. It had been closed on November 26, 1952 as an economy measure.<sup>43</sup> British Guiana was thereafter covered from Trinidad. Consul Burke continued to send regular reports on political developments in British Guiana as will be seen below. Later, as the American pressure increased on British Guiana, the Consulate would be re-opened. We take up the British Guiana story in 1953.

#### **i) The 1953 Electoral Campaign**

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<sup>39</sup> See Rabe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175, fn.51.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177, fn. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Department of State Bulletin, Nov. 30, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box. 3543. p. 766. Maryland. US National Archives.

On April 2, 1953, Consul Maddox reported on the election campaign underway in British Guiana. Referring to the PPP he reported: "Communist Group Best Organized"; that the PPP was drawing 300-500 persons to its meetings in urban centers; and that meetings were held regularly.<sup>44</sup>

During the election campaign, and at the polling stations, according to Maddox's Reports, the PPP had made good preparations to ensure that the Party symbol a "cup" was supplemented by the names of both Cheddi and Janet Jagan. From the election results, he concluded that the PPP had tremendous appeal to the working people. In Maddox's opinion, he had seen little opportunity among the non-communist opposition to weaken the PPP's strength.<sup>45</sup>

As all of this was going on, warnings of a communist menace were being sent from and to Washington, as we shall see next.

## ii) Reported Warnings

On 15 April 1953, a local newspaper, The Daily Argosy<sup>46</sup> carried an editorial commenting that Mr. Spruille Braden, the then US Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, had warned of a Communist menace in the Western Hemisphere. It advised that Braden's warning should be heeded by British Guianese and the Caribbean Islands for "we know that Moscow is also paying attention to these small countries" because "there is sufficient evidence...that Communist agents, official and unofficial, are operating in British Guiana and their efforts are meeting a certain measure of success."<sup>47</sup> The Daily Argosy cautioned:

"British Governments have been known to be generous with persons with fascist and communist ideas but the time has come when British Guiana and the Caribbean Islands must join with the rest of the Americas and refuse to relax their vigilance. Rather we should double our guard right now. We must take all steps necessary and these including closing our doors to aliens who are known Communists, or in sympathy with Communism as well as making sure that Communist propaganda does not enter our territories. We must get busy and make sure that any influence Soviet Russia may have in these countries cut to zero."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Maddox's Report: "Lively Campaign Marking First British Guiana Experiment with Universal Suffrage." April 2, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3545. 1953. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The Daily Argosy, 15 April 1953, p. 4. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>47</sup> The Daily Argosy, 19 April 1953. p. 4. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>48</sup> The Daily Argosy, 19 April 1953, p. 4. Ibid.

It was in this context that the PPP electoral victory of 27 April 1953 took place. How did the Americans react? We shall look at this in the next section.

### iii) Reaction to the PPP Victory of 27 April 1953

American concerns would increase after 27 April 1953 when the PPP won 18 out of the 24 seats at the elections and its victory caused much anxiety in the State Department. Three days later, after the PPP victory, an internal memorandum was written at the State Department by Mr. Waldo Campbell to Mr. William Johnstone entitled: "Communist-dominated Party Sweeps British Guiana General Election."<sup>49</sup> It recorded that the Department had been very concerned about the victory of the PPP and more so about the large margin of its victory. The victory had given the PPP a strong position in the 27-member House of Assembly (the Lower House) – 18 out of 24 seats, thus giving the PPP a dominant position in both houses. The PPP had obtained six of the ten ministerial positions in the Executive Council.<sup>50</sup> Campbell's analysis of the PPP victory revealed clearly the department's uneasiness with PPP influence in the composition of the next Government of British Guiana. It feared that although Governor Savage would retain extraordinary powers, the PPP's:

“...attempt to inaugurate collective responsibility of ministers to the lower house gives the Jagan group a perfect opportunity to disseminate Communism in British Guiana and adjacent territories ...”<sup>51</sup>

There were other grounds for US concerns, as we shall see below:

### iv) Implications for the Caribbean

The significance for the Caribbean of the “communist dominated” Party's election victory was cited in an internal memorandum of the Department of State of May 1, 1953 from Raynor to Merchant;

“The victory of the PPP is especially significant, since any future success the party may have in British Guiana may be expected to have repercussions

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<sup>49</sup> Campbell's memorandum to Johnstone, 30 April, 1953. DOS decimal files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland, US National Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Positions not controlled by the PPP included: Chief Secretary, Finance Secretary, Attorney General and a Minister Without Portfolio elected by the upper house. Campbell's memorandum to Johnstone, April 30, 1953. *Loc. Cit.* in note 49 above.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Johnstone's fear of the spread of Communism was not confined to British Guiana as appears from the following part of his report: “...Jagan's success in gaining prominence and power by following the Communist line will make a profound impression on the politically ambitious in other Caribbean colonies”. *Ibid.*

in other British colonies in the Caribbean, especially British Honduras, Jamaica and possibly Trinidad.”<sup>52</sup>

Raynor cited the PPP’s external links: They had sent members to “communist-inspired gatherings” as the World Peace Congress at Prague and the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Berlin. They had set up a local Peace Committee and a Pioneer Youth Movement, “both of which are dominated by the PPP executives.” It seemed that “the aims of the PPP include the establishment of an independent socialist British Guiana within the framework of the Commonwealth, nationalisation of all major industries, and increased ministerial responsibility.”<sup>53</sup>

While Raynor recognised that British Guiana could be a spring-board for the spread of communism to other West Indian colonies, he also recognised that “... the low living conditions of the mass of the people in these territories makes them particularly susceptible to communist propaganda.”<sup>54</sup> Consul Skora, had already drawn the Department of State’s attention to this danger in a memorandum of July 8, 1948.<sup>55</sup> For Raynor, Cheddi Jagan’s programme for British Guiana and the repercussions of a PPP victory in the wider Caribbean had to be countered because:

“...the British colonies in the Caribbean Area are of vital strategic importance to the US. The West Indian Islands guard the eastern approaches to the Panama Canal. The US has defense bases on several British Caribbean islands. Some of the islands are important sources of strategic raw materials: bauxite (British Guiana and Jamaica), oil (Trinidad) and wood (British Honduras).”<sup>56</sup>

Fighting Cheddi Jagan meant understanding the reasons for his success. On May 4, 1953, Maddox, in his report to the Department of State, had attributed the PPP success to cohesive and effective party organization...”<sup>57</sup> He had also commented on the “profound importance for the future of British Guiana and of the West Indies of whether the PPP is communist, or simply

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<sup>52</sup> Office Memorandum, Raynor to Merchant, “Significance of British Guiana Elections,” May 1, 1953. DOS decimal files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> G. Skora’s Report, “Certain comments on the Growth of Communism in the Colony of British Guiana,” July 8, 1948. *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Raynor’s Memorandum to Merchant. “Significance of British Guiana Elections.” *Loc. Cit.*, in fn 52 above.

<sup>57</sup> Maddox’s Report: “PPP Victorious in British Guiana elections,” May 4, 1953. Dispatch # 239. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 3535. Maryland. US National Archives.

nationalist and radical left-wing.”<sup>58</sup> Maddox was aware of the historical significance of putting a communist label on the PPP, for, he went on: “if the PPP can be properly labelled as a communist party, it is the first time in British imperial history that such a party has ever captured control of a central legislative body.”<sup>59</sup> However, Maddox named Janet Jagan a Marxist and said that she was the driving force for communism within the PPP. Janet Jagan, he reported, “has been responsible for her husband’s orientation towards communism...”<sup>60</sup>

The sweeping victory of the PPP had stunned everyone, even the PPP itself. As Maddox noted, “...there are no area precedents for such a sweeping party victory; there are no area precedents for any significant party group in a legislative body being composed in such considerable measure of men and women who, by all visible manifestations, can only be described as communist.”<sup>61</sup> The State Department was moved to mobilisation against a communist threat in British Guiana as we shall see below.

#### v. Mobilisation in the Department of State

Fearful that the PPP victory could inspire leftwing activities in other British colonies in the Caribbean, the Department of State was spurred to action.<sup>62</sup> On May 8, 1953 Secretary of State, Dulles, wrote to Maddox in Port-of-Spain in the following terms:

Consul General is authorised to proceed at earliest possible moment to Georgetown and prepare a comprehensive report on significance of British Guiana elections, as well as his estimate on possible repercussions within British Guiana and elsewhere in Trinidad Consular District. You should inform the Department immediately if sufficient funds with which to pay the cost of the trip are not available in local travel account.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Maddox’s Report: “PPP Victorious in British Guiana elections,” May 4, 1953. *Op. Cit.* ..

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Consul Maddox made further interesting comments on the PPP victory. “.Moreover, global experience has demonstrated that, in a ‘democratic-front’ coalition, the fanaticism and vigorous discipline of a sizable communist section can suffice to secure controlling influence over non-communist colleagues, less single-minded in their creeds and attachments...And, in any event, the strong nationalist and socialist orientation of the non-communist elements in the PPP should result in support of a number of measures and policies which, under present local circumstances, Moscow would find pleasing.”

<sup>62</sup> As was seen in fn. 49 above American diplomats had feared that Jagan’s success in gaining prominence and power by following the Communist line would make an impression on the political ambitious in other colonies.

<sup>63</sup> Dulles’s Telegram to AMCONSUL, Port-of Spain. (Trinidad), 8 May 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

The Department of State spared no expenses in order to keep abreast of the political situation unfolding in British Guiana under the 'Communist-dominated People's Progressive Party...'”<sup>64</sup> The Department of State sought to mobilise the British Government into action, threatening to cut off British Guiana's quota of labour in the US Migratory farm labour scheme if the British Government did not heed its warning.<sup>65</sup> The British Government therefore decided to send Archibald Campbell, Colonial Officer to Washington, to make an on-the-spot investigation.

What actually were the communist prospects in British Guiana? We look at this next.

#### 4. The Communist Prospect in British Guiana

With the 1953 elections behind the PPP, its future actions would determine the course of British Guiana's future. The policies of the Government remained unclear in the immediate-post-election period. There were signs of disaffection within and outside its party. There was local opposition to the PPP following a communist line. There were protests from local groups of government employees, who had supported the PPP in the elections but who were against participation of the "Peace Committee"<sup>66</sup> in the Party's May Day demonstration. There were protests on May 7, 1953 by members of the South Georgetown Group of the PPP. In making their opposition to communism clear, the Group sent two letters to Janet Jagan, then Secretary of the PPP and at the same time released these to the Press.<sup>67</sup> The group<sup>68</sup> had criticised "the advocacy of communism by Westmaas, Carter and 'comrades' Robertson Huntley, Benn, Osborne and Cassato. Clinton Wong, the then Vice-Chairman of the PPP had tendered his resignation in protest against the direction that the Party was headed towards. Wong was in the Burnham camp, and was

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<sup>64</sup> Dulles's Telegram to AMCONSUL, Port-of Spain. (Trinidad), 8 May 1953. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>65</sup> The Department of State had initiated the Migratory Labour Scheme to assist the British Government with labour problems in British Guiana.

<sup>66</sup> The "Peace Committee" had allegedly been a communist front organisation set up by Rory Westmaas, who had been considered by the US as a hardline communist under the supervision of Janet Jagan.

<sup>67</sup> Maddox's Report, "British Guiana Political Developments," May 29, 1953. Dispatch #269. DOS Decimal Files. 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. US National Archives.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

considered to be the moderate wing of the Party. Maddox reported on all of these developments regularly and did, at one stage, see a sign of hope.

**a. Sign of hope**

Maddox saw a window of hope with the announcement of the relegation of Janet Jagan to the position of Deputy Speaker in May 1953.<sup>69</sup> This move, in his assessment, indicated that Janet Jagan's position had been weakened and that she would have to slow down or alter course. He also thought that it had weakened Cheddi Jagan's position within the Party. Could the Party afford more 'defections'? Forbes Burnham was reportedly in favour of a middle-of-the road stance. He had repeatedly criticised Cheddi Jagan's hard-line communist positions. In Maddox's opinion, Cheddi Jagan surely had to give serious thought to this aspect. Should Forbes Burnham decide to leave the Party, the PPP Government would not survive since Burnham's supporters, in all probability, would follow him. Maddox reported that in July 1953, during discussions in the House, Cheddi Jagan, leader of the House, had "turned aside" two legislative motions which had endorsed the PPP Manifesto, when he realised that the Government's solvency could be at stake.<sup>70</sup> Were these gestures, Maddox asked, an indication of Cheddi Jagan going "soft" on the communist line, or was he showing himself as being a responsible person, which a few PPP watchers had hoped for? Despite these questions, the State Department remained vigilant.

**b. Continued Vigilance at the Department of State**

Growing concern at the Department of State over the PPP victory and its repercussions already felt in the Caribbean<sup>71</sup> led Mr. Smith (acting for Mr. Dulles) to send the following aerogramme to American Consulates of four countries in Latin America:

"Department would appreciate receiving your estimate of the possible repercussions, political, social, and economic, of the recent victory in British Guiana of the Communist-dominated People's Progressive Party led by Cheddi Jagan.

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<sup>69</sup> Op. Cit., in fn. 67. This move was interpreted by Maddox as a Jagan retreat.

<sup>70</sup> One motion called for 90 additional State scholarships for 1953. The second motion called for a reduction in the qualifying age for old age pension from 65 to 60. See Maddox' Report, "Current Political Notes on British Guiana, I." July 10, 1953. DOS Decimal Files. 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>71</sup> Op. Cit.; in fn. 49,



“Include your opinion, and the opinion of local observers, as to the possible effect Jagan's victory might have on his future course of action, e.g. is he likely to become more responsible, or more radical? Do you think that the PPP's decisive victory has encouraged local leftwing to believe that they can successfully follow his example, or that local leftwing are likely to build up Jagan as a Caribbean leader?”

“Have you any suggestions as to measures which might appropriately be taken to assist in combating the growth of Communism in your area and the possible growth of anti-Americanism sentiments?”<sup>72</sup>

What the Department of State probably feared most was that, with such a decisive victory, and with more than 50% of the voters' approval to pursue its election manifesto, the PPP would have boldly begun to implement its policies and that the Colonial Government would have been unable to stop the demand for change. For the US, it was not only the success of a communist government in British Guiana but its impact within the Caribbean at large that most frightened them. From the US perspective, it was not difficult to arrive at the conclusion that the Soviet Union could gain a strong foothold in its backyard. Such a development would have been unpalatable to the US. To counter the growth of communism in the region, the Department took a strong stance with the Colonial Government.

Maddox had already suggested in his Report of 12 May 1953 the establishment of a USIA Office in Trinidad.<sup>73</sup> His May 27, 1953 Report indicated that there had been “many responsible citizens” in British Guiana who were worried about possible effects on investments from abroad, as well as on a projected loan from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).<sup>74</sup> Other American diplomatic posts in the region also reacted to the developments in British Guiana.

### **c. Assessments from American Diplomatic Posts in the Region**

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<sup>72</sup> Smith's Airgram, May 18, 1953, AMCONSULS : Port of Spain (Trinidad); Belize (British Honduras); Barbados (British West Indies) and Kingston (Jamaica). DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives..

<sup>73</sup> Maddox's Report of May 12, 1953, “Measures to Combat Communism and Anti-Americanism” had suggested the establishment of a ‘USIA Office’ in Trinidad. On this Report, Maddox assured the State Dept. that he “will continue to follow as closely as circumstances permit.”

<sup>74</sup> Maddox's Report, “Concern Over Treatment of British Guianese Visitors to US,” May 27, 1953. Dispatch #268. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

At the request of the Department of State, American diplomatic posts in the region provided their assessments of the evolving situation in British Guiana. On May 28, 1953, Consul General John Hamlin in Jamaica reported:

“Local encouragement derived from Cheddi Jagan’s success showed itself in a press declaration by Mr. Richard Hart, that Dr. Jagan’s victory will help check “the wave of restriction on civil liberties which has been proceeding in West Indies in recent years.”<sup>75</sup>

Consul Hamlin opined that victory would whet Jagan’s appetite for power, rather than make him more responsible and added, “I believe that approval of his program and approaches to Cheddi Jagan by Jamaican and other outside left-wingers could easily spirit him on in his natural tendency toward radical action.”<sup>76</sup> Hamlin further assessed, “...that in the absence of a better prospect the left-wingers in the Caribbean will attempt to build up Cheddi Jagan as a Caribbean leader.” In fact, he pointed out in his Report, that the police in Jamaica had already reported on the formation of Communist cells in rural areas and estimated that there had been about five hundred communists in Jamaica.<sup>77</sup> He, nevertheless, expressed the view that the Jamaican leaders, Bustamante, leader of the Labour Party, the government majority, and Norman Manley of the People’s National (Opposition) both professedly anti-communist, would endeavour to prevent Cheddi Jagan’s further ascendancy.<sup>78</sup>

In British Guiana, PPP leaders would strut the stage.

#### **d. Flaunting Conduct**

Buoyed by victory, Janet Jagan described by some as “Communist leader of British Guiana,”<sup>79</sup> undertook a visit to Paramaribo, Surinam on 31 May 1953 allegedly to tap into the Indian community. During her stay, Janet Jagan, it was reported, had denied that the PPP was a

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<sup>75</sup> Hamlin’s Report, “People’s progressive Party Victory in British Guiana and Effect in Jamaica,” May 28, 1953. Dispatch #273. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> So described by American Consul, F.H. Murrell in his Report of June 5, 1953, dispatch #155, “Visit of Mrs. Janet Jagan to Surinam.” DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box. 3543. US National Archives.

communist organisation. She had stated that it was a socialist group. However, when asked if she herself was a communist, "Mrs. Jagan evaded the question."<sup>80</sup> This would suggest that PPP leaders were quite aware of the larger geopolitical struggle and consequences of their political stances. Consul Murrell reported on Janet Jagan's visit in Surinam thus:

"...I have been informed that during her stay of twenty four hours, Mrs. Jagan was under surveillance constantly...."<sup>81</sup>

"She ... met and talked with Mr. Lou Litchveld, ...a former Minister of Education and Public Health...[He] was formerly a member of the Communist Party. His meeting with Mrs. Jagan has aroused interest and the Dutch officials are wondering if it presages renewed interest in Communist activities."

"Mrs. Jagan visited Mr. F.L. de Rooy, Editor of the newspaper "De Tijd". The newspaper has been quite successful in enlarging its circulation. Just what its politics are, no one has been able to determine. With the visit of Mrs. Jagan ... the activities of both the editor and the newspaper will be more closely watched by the Dutch authorities."<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, according to Murrell's Report, the Dutch Government had become more concerned about the infiltration of communism in its territory since the visit of Janet Jagan on May 31, 1953. In his words: "...the Dutch Officials are now coming to realise that communism is definitely on their doorstep..."<sup>83</sup>

In face of the evolving situation in British Guiana, American Officials would send open as well as subtle messages to British Guianese.

#### e. Subtle Messages

That the US feared the communist threat in British Guiana was evident in messages it subtly sent on visa requirements. Reacting to earlier press reports that Guianese might be denied visas to enter the USA, Maddox stated, following a visit to the colony in June 1953,

"Any individual here may be assured that whatever his party affiliation may be, his visa application will receive the same consideration...United States laws do, however, as is well known, prohibit in most cases the admission of Communists and members of

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<sup>80</sup> So described by American Consul, F.H. Murrell in his Report of June 5, 1953, dispatch #155, "Visit of Mrs. Janet Jagan to Surinam." Op. Cit.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

totalitarian organisations dedicated to the subversion or overthrow of American democratic institutions.

“In the course of my few days here I have heard many expressions of goodwill on the part of British Guianese towards Americans. I want to say that these friendly sentiments are heartily reciprocated. We in America have always had the warmest feelings for your country and your people and we wish you a happy and prosperous future.”<sup>84</sup>

The US Government was trying to avoid any buildup of anti-American feelings within the country. While Maddox was attempting to play the ‘honest broker’ between his Government and the people of British Guiana, the American Press had already reached a conclusion. News correspondent, R.J. Alexander of the New York Herald Tribune, commanded the front pages of the Guiana Sunday Chronicle when his views on British Guiana were reported as follows: “‘Experiment in British Guiana’. The colony of British Guiana has the only Communist-led Government in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>85</sup> Despite such warnings, PPP leaders continued on a carefree course.

#### f. Further Flaunting Activity

Growing US opposition to PPP activities in British Guiana appeared to have had no impact on Janet Jagan, since she continued to pursue her political agenda. Early in June 1953, it was reported that she had visited Copenhagen where, according to Maddox, she had attended the Women’s Conference, and thereafter visited Vienna and Bucharest. The same report mentioned an unconfirmed trip to Moscow also.<sup>86</sup> However, no evidence is available about a visit to Moscow.

With her continued association with the Eastern Bloc countries and the PPP’s determination to follow its campaign manifesto (which included land reforms, increased sugar production, wage reviews among others), Consul Maddox did not see an encouraging picture for the future of an independent British Guiana. He had recognised that US financial assistance would be crucial to the

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<sup>84</sup> “Political Affiliation No Bar to Guianese Entering US”, Daily Argosy, 27 June 1953. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>85</sup> R.J. Alexander, “Experiment in British Guiana,” written after his visit to the colony. The Sunday Chronicle, 27 September 1953. Georgetown, Guyana National Archives. p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Maddox’s Report to DOS, “PPP Economic Program Still in Process of Formulation,” July 16, 1953. Dispatch #15. DOS Decimal Files :1950-1954. RG59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.



colony's economic development: "...there can be no question in anyone's mind that British Guiana will require considerable capital to keep its production expanding as fast, or faster, than its increasing population. And this capital can only in part be obtained at home."<sup>87</sup> However, Consul Maddox was sceptical about Cheddi Jagan's economic programme. During a discussion he had with Cheddi Jagan on American private capital in British Guiana, Maddox pointed out to Cheddi Jagan that, "private capital would naturally want to know precisely the conditions under which it might be allowed to operate over the long range and Cheddi Jagan said no Government could make promises over a long range."<sup>88</sup> Maddox wrote: "Thereupon, I suggested that the PPP was about as radically left as any party likely to obtain power in British Guiana for a long time."<sup>89</sup>

Cheddi Jagan was oblivious to such messages and continued on his course.

#### **g. Lifting the Ban on the Entry of Communists**

On July 16, 1953, Maddox reported on the lifting of the "Entry Ban on Communists." The PPP had made good on one of its pre-election promises. The "entry ban" was repealed in the Legislative Council and the six West Indians<sup>90</sup> who had been subjected to the ban were free to travel to British Guiana, much to the displeasure of both the Colonial Government and the Department of State. Maddox reported that while in Trinidad, Mr. Gangadeen, a PPP supporter, had delivered a number of speeches, "under the auspices of local Communist organisations" prior to his departure for British Guiana.<sup>91</sup> The PPP Government, he said, had strong backing from the Trinidad communists. The repeal of the ban by the PPP Government had given hope to the communists in the Caribbean islands.

The PPP maintained its course at home.

#### **h. Repeal of the Subversive Literature Bill**

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<sup>87</sup> Maddox's Report to DOS, "PPP Economic Program Still in Process of Formulation." Op. Cit.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> The six men were Messrs: Ferdinand Smith (naturalised US citizen), Richard Hart (Jamaican), Bill Strachan (naturalised British citizen) and John LA Rose / Quinton O'Connor / John Rojas (Trinidadians).

<sup>91</sup> Maddox's Report, "Current Political Notes on British Guiana, II." July 16, 1953. Dispatch #17. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

After it was sworn in on 30 May 1953, one of the first acts of the PPP had been to call for the “Repeal of Subversive Literature Ban”. The PPP had been importing what the Colonial Government had described as “communist” literature from the Eastern bloc countries, and these had been banned by Governor Savage. By July 31 the Government had succeeded in its efforts to repeal the ban. In the Report that Maddox subsequently sent to the State Department, he had this to say:

“An Examination of the lengthy report of the proceedings in the Georgetown press reveals that PPP oratory soared to dizzy heights and ran the gamut of their customary clichés. In displaying exultation that the possession of power now enabled them to turn the tables on ‘the enemies of the people’, they were obviously engaging in self-glorification and in playing to the gallery. Perhaps the cathartic action of the exercise might be beneficial, but the price of an entire legislative session (when so many other matters of pressing importance to the Colony await action) was a heavy one to exact.”<sup>92</sup>

It was therefore of little surprise that the USA feared the entrenchment of communism in British Guiana.

#### **i. US Fears of the Entrenchment of Communism**

One of the real concerns for the United States at this stage had been that the PPP Government had begun to consolidate its power. It had successfully challenged the Colonial Government. The US could not openly intervene in British Guiana’s affairs, nor did they think that the British Government understood its (US) fears of communism in the colony. Maddox’s Report of 20 August gave a lucid account of a conversation with Cheddi Jagan which strengthened his fears of the entrenchment of communism in British Guiana. He stated:

“...Dr. Cheddi JAGAN, Leader of the House of Assembly, reaffirmed his socialism (‘...I am a confirmed socialist – perhaps too red and outspoken for some people’), and declared that, just as capitalism replaced feudalism and socialism will replace capitalism, so ‘socialism itself will evolve into the higher communist stage of society.’”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Maddox’s Report, “Repeal of Subversive Literature Ban Voted by B.G. Assembly.” DOS Decimal Files, 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Maddox’s Report, “Current Political Notes on British Guiana, IV: Extremism Gains Ground,” Aug. 20, 1953. Dispatch #55. Port-of-Spain. DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

In this same Report, Maddox gave an account of how Cheddi Jagan had proceeded to defend the Soviet Union against criticisms. He stated: "He proceeded to condemn 'the propaganda about Soviet imperialism and slave camps'; to characterize the Russian revolution as one fought 'not to bring about oppression, but rather to end it'; to proclaim 'ardent' support of the world peace movement, and to denounce the expenditure of 'billions of dollars ... for armaments and war preparations.'"94

Cheddi Jagan claimed that he had not banned capitalists, but had seen a future role for them which he had expressed in the following statement:

"...I do not want to give the impression that capitalists have no place in our community. For a good many years to come, it is true that capitalists – particularly our local capitalists – have a progressive role to play..."95

In Maddox's view, Cheddi Jagan's profession of his political ideology, and his likes and dislikes had conformed to earlier patterns. Maddox felt that he had become more forthright and forceful than usual, possibly due to the influence of his wife, who had returned to the Colony "from a left-leaning meeting in Denmark and iron curtain countries just a few weeks go..."96 Maddox believed that Janet Jagan had received more indoctrination and instructions from the Communists while she had been abroad, which the Government had begun to implement. Maddox further reported that Cheddi Jagan had threatened to ban Press interviews with Ministers.

As the situation evolved, strikes returned to British Guiana.

#### **j. The Return of Strikes and Fear of a PPP Dictatorship**

Maddox's August 20, 1953 Report gave a summary of Press Reports which highlighted the mood of the country in August. In his assessment: "the elements were more likely to cause apprehension than hope. Four months have now elapsed since the election. It is hard to see that the PPP can yet point with pride to anything concrete in the way of improvements for the Colony."97

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<sup>94</sup> Maddox's Report, "Current Political Notes on British Guiana, IV: Extremism Gains Ground," Aug. 20, 1953. Dispatch #55. Port-of-Spain. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Maddox Report. *Op. Cit.*, in note 93.

On September 10, 1953, Maddox reported on the sugar strike which had been organised by the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU). He stated that, "...it was the first time in history that a strike has shut down the entire industry..."<sup>98</sup> He added that the strikes had been instigated and fomented in large part by PPP Ministers. He named particularly Latchmansingh and Sydney King, and singled out King as "a leading Communist member."<sup>99</sup> Maddox further stated that Janet Jagan had also taken part in the meetings.<sup>100</sup> From Maddox's experience with the workings of PPP operations, he said he had sensed that something was amiss within the PPP and which had led him to think that there might have been some hesitancy among the GIWU delegates when the matter was discussed. The discussions had lasted six hours before a decision was eventually taken. Whatever took place at the meeting Maddox noted that in the aftermath, "...there were no indications of any breach among PPP supporters. In fact support was forthcoming from other unions even in the face of possible difficulties."<sup>101</sup> The sugar workers, it would appear, were prepared to give their loyal support to the GIWU. The loss of wages and bonuses must have been a terrible strain on them and their families. They had put so much hope in the PPP and trust in the Government.

In Maddox's opinion, "...the ultimate goal, may well be believed the elimination of all existing constitutional, political and economic curbs on its power and the establishment of a PPP dictatorship."<sup>102</sup> It must have been very frustrating for Maddox that the British Government did not seem to display such concerns or anxieties about the presence of communism in the Americas as the US did. His mood is reflected in his Report:

"...Assuming that these extremist influences continue to prevail in the PPP, Governor Savage of British Guiana and his loyal British advisers, together

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<sup>98</sup> Maddox's Report, "British Guiana Sugar Industry Crippled by Strike: Tensions High," Sept. 10, 1953. Dispatch #76. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>99</sup> Dr. J.P. Latchmansingh was a Minister of the Government and President of the Union (GIWU).

<sup>100</sup> Maddox described her as "the Communist Janet Jagan." It may be noted that Mrs. Jagan was not a Minister in the PPP government of 1953.

<sup>101</sup> Other unions which had indicated support were the Federation of Unions of Government Employees (FUGE), British Guiana Labour Union (BGLU, as well as the Sawmill and Forest Workers' Union. Maddox's Report, "British Guiana Sugar Industry Crippled by Strike: Tensions High," Sept. 10, 1953. Dispatch #76. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives. .

<sup>102</sup> Ibid..



with the Government in London, must take a determined stand at some not too distant date, failing which the Colony will certainly drift towards political and economic disaster...”

“...indeed, until or unless the peak of the current crisis is passed, the situation remains fraught with immediate dangers to the tranquillity of this region.”<sup>103</sup>

By September 17, 1953, Maddox probably had some satisfaction from his warning some 10 days earlier on. The sugar strike was still in full swing. What had happened within the last ten days was that there had been a run on the Postal Savings Bank. The people had been withdrawing their money, including some PPP Ministers' wives, it was reported.<sup>104</sup>

This meant that doubts about PPP plans were being raised. Meanwhile, the Department of State had learnt from the Colonial Official at the British Embassy that the strikers had set fire to some 20 acres of sugar cane,<sup>105</sup> but that the PPP ministers had not as yet “openly used their influence to spread the strike to other industries.”<sup>106</sup>

Maddox's fears would be taken up by an American Congressman.

#### **k. Congressman Jackson Voices Concern**

By 26 September 1953, the US could be seen continuing to pursue its course in combating communism in the British Guiana. On 26 September 1953, the Honourable Donald I. Jackson,<sup>107</sup> Chairman of the Inter-American Affairs Sub-Committee of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, visited British Guiana as part of his visit to Latin America. The Honourable Jackson's mission to British Guiana lasted one day, which would seem quite a short visit to fully assess the mood of the country. It can therefore be concluded that the Honourable Jackson may have met

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<sup>103</sup> Unions support for the sugar strike.....in 1953. *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 101.

<sup>104</sup> Maddox's Report, “British Guiana Political Notes - VII,” Sept. 17, 1953. Dispatch #85. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>105</sup> Setting fire to cane fields had long been practiced in the Caribbean region.

<sup>106</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Christensen, Dept. of State Official and Archibald Campbell, Colonial Officer at the British Embassy, Washington, D.C., Sept. 17, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>107</sup> “Special Study Mission to Latin America on Technical Cooperation,” report by Hon. Donald Jackson (California) Chairman Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs US Congress, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1953. US Government Printing Office, 1954, pp. 21-22. Washington D.C. Library of Congress.

chiefly with Governor Savage and discussed the PPP political agenda. Upon his return to the United States, Jackson said:

“...it is always difficult to determine at what point extreme nationalism merges with Communist influence, it is reasonable to state that a considerable measure of Communist infiltration into government has occurred in British Guiana. Several of the leaders in agitation are self-possessed Communists ....”<sup>108</sup>

His report revealed nothing new that had not been already known about the PPP. However, what this visit indicated was that the US Government was preparing itself to intervene at some future date. The US had great fears of the spread of communism in the Caribbean/Latin America region. In 1953 the US had claimed that not only in British Guiana was communism identified but also in Guatemala. Real or unreal, the State Department at this point in time was carefully watching every move and every action of the PPP Government in British Guiana. The US saw the hands of the Soviet Union in a push to extend its sphere of influence in Latin America - even if there was little tangible evidence of this.

On 27 September, 1953 the Sunday Chronicle carried a headline “Experiment in British Guiana” which drew on an article by R.J. Alexander published in the New York Herald Tribune. Following his visit to British Guiana, Alexander had written in the Herald Tribune that “...the colony of British Guiana has the only Communist-led Government in the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>109</sup>

On September 29, 1953, the Daily Chronicle<sup>110</sup> carried a story, “US Closely Watching Political Situation in B.G.” It was datelined Port-of-Spain, 27 September. It read as follows:

“The present situation in B.G. is being closely followed by the United States Department, said Donald I. Jackson, Chairman of the Inter-American Affairs Sub-Committee of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee...

‘We are following the situation in British Guiana. It is an integral part of the entire hemisphere defence picture. It is a matter which is being closely followed on a day-to-day basis by the Department of State.’

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<sup>108</sup> Honorable Jackson’s “Special Study Mission to Latin America...” Op. Cit.

<sup>109</sup> “Experiment in British Guiana.” the Sunday Chronicle. Georgetown, Guyana National Archives. 27 Sept. 1953, p. 5.

<sup>110</sup> “Experiment in British Guiana” the Sunday Chronicle. Ibid.

'Jackson went on: 'Any substantial beachhead established in the hemisphere by Communist elements was naturally a matter of grave concern to all of Latin American Republics and to all who held to the principle that Communism was a way of life which degraded human dignity and created a spiritual vacuum.'"<sup>111</sup>

The growing American fears about a communist danger in British Guiana led Maddox to discuss the matter directly with Governor Savage.

### **I Maddox Discusses Fears with Governor**

The US fears of the entrenchment of communism in British Guiana had been re-inforced following Maddox's visit to British Guiana when he discussed the matter with Governor Savage.

Maddox reported to Secretary of State Dulles thus:

"Returned from British Guiana last night. With PPP leaders pressing hard to establish complete control colony, consolidated Communist bridgehead this area distinctly possible unless menace firmly met. Governor clearly recognizes he may have to call showdown with discretionary powers soon, possibly within few weeks. PPP obstructs such course, UK military aid may become necessary. Plans laid on this contingency."<sup>112</sup>

By this time the British were ready to act and did so shortly thereafter.

#### **m. The British Act**

The "showdown" which Maddox mentioned in his telegram of October 1, 1953, took place earlier than he envisaged. On October 5, 1953 the Department of State learnt from media reports that the British Privy Council had taken the decision to suspend the Constitution of British Guiana without consulting the Department of State. Maddox claimed that that was due to the lack of information from the US Consulate in Port-of-Spain.<sup>113</sup>

On October 5, 1953 Raynor at the US Department of State called James Penfield at the US Embassy, London to discuss the recent actions taken by the British Government without consulting the American Government. The conversation is recorded as follows:

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<sup>111</sup> "US Closely Watching Political Situation in B.G.," The Daily Chronicle, 29 September 1953. It was datelined Port-of-Spain, 27 Sept. 1953. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>112</sup> Maddox's Report on his visit to British Guiana on 30 September, 1953. October 1, 1953. Dispatch #36. DOS Decimal Files, 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>113</sup> Maddox had advised the Department of State that Governor Rance of Trinidad had not been informed by Governor Savage nor by London. Maddox suggested to the Department that the US Embassy, London should assume an active reporting role.

"I called Mr Penfield in our London Embassy around 11.30 this morning. I told Mr Penfield that there were various reports appearing in the press and on the radio to the effect that troops were on their way to British Guiana; that the Privy Council had decided to suspend the Constitution of the Colony, etc. I said that we had almost a complete lack of authoritative information from the British on the question. I asked Mr Penfield to attempt to get information for us on this matter urgently and particularly to inquire as to how bad the British felt the situation now was in the Colony and also to obtain authoritative information on British plans to deal with it. I told Mr Penfield that a telegram was on its way asking the Embassy to make certain representations to British authorities on this subject but asked him not to await the arrival of this wire before setting out on the fact-finding expedition referred to above."

"Mr. Penfield said that the Embassy had sent over around 10.00 a.m. today a telegram containing certain information but that probably it did not contain all of the information we wanted and he would endeavour to obtain additional information for us immediately."<sup>114</sup>

It is quite clear that the British Government had taken some crucial decisions without consulting the Department of State and this gave rise to a flurry of telephone calls between the Department and the American Embassy in London. However, there had been detailed conversations between Maddox and Governor Savage in which Governor Savage had expressed mounting concern over the 'communist threat.' From what followed, it became evident that The Department had not been happy with the British Government's 'go it alone' decision. On October 5 Mr. Aldrich, US Embassy, London advised the Secretary of State that he would: "...discuss British Guiana at high level tomorrow..."<sup>115</sup> That same day Raynor spoke with Minister Scott, British Embassy, Washington. Raynor wanted to know "the British plans to deal with the situation in

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<sup>114</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between H. Raynor, (BNA) and Penfield, October 5, 1953. RG 59. DOS Decimal Files, 1950-1954. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>115</sup> Telegram from Aldrich, US embassy, London to Secretary of State. Dispatch #1440. October 5, 1953. DOS. Decimal Files, 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives,

British Guiana."<sup>116</sup> Later in the evening of October 5, 1953, Aldrich informed the Secretary of

State:

"PM conferring on British Guiana at 7 p.m. British have plan to take over and give emergency full powers to governor ..."<sup>117</sup>

On October 6, 1953 Aldrich, US Embassy London, sent the following cable to the Department of State explaining the British 'go-it-alone' action at that time:

"UK decided on British Guiana action at this time because of series of dangerous local moves, i.e. sugar strike, attempt at general strike, both of which were led by Ministers, conduct of Ministers in local legislature, evidence of increasing visits to and from British Guiana by Communists and general intensification of PPP efforts to tighten hold on colony. UK decided that it must act quickly before situation deteriorates further, particularly since signs were that continued delay in 'stiffening' would mean local police would not hold firm. Publicity emanating from Admiralty made secrecy impossible and Coloff will probably issue general statement later today. Originally it had been hoped to avoid publicity until actions had been taken. There is no doubt situation is such as to justify serious step of sending in troops.'

"Press has been freely predicting that British Guiana Government will be suspended and popular press anticipates arrest of Jagans."<sup>118</sup>

Anticipating questions from the Press and public about Britain's "decision without consultation" Maddox at Port-of-Spain had consequently been informed by The State Department on the line to take. To play down the fact that the British Government had not consulted the Department of State on its action, the Department instructed all American Diplomatic posts in South America to take the following line:

"Although we not officially consulted by British re situation in British Guiana or action contemplated, we have been generally informed of developments. Our view is that establishment Commie bridgehead there would be matter deep concern all

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<sup>116</sup> Memorandum of a Conversation between Raynor, State Department and Minister Scott, British Embassy, London. 5 October, 1953: "By direction of Mr Bonbright I called Mr Scott this afternoon and told him that we lacked any authoritative information as to the situation in British Guiana and as to British plans for dealing with it. I said that we were, of course, greatly interested in this problem because of the location of the Colony. Scott said he had the impression that the Embassy had some information on the subject and that he would ask his Colonial Attaché to get in touch with US on it. Later Mr. Beeley confirmed that the Embassy had certain information and he would have it with him when he called on me tomorrow afternoon. I urged the Colonial Attaché in the meantime to transmit to Mr. Christenson on the Caribbean Desk whatever information the Embassy had. I repeated our desire to be kept fully informed." DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG59, Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>117</sup> Aldrich's cable, US Embassy, London, to Secretary of State. Dispatch #1438. October 5, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>118</sup> Aldrich's cable, US Embassy, London, to Secretary of State. Dispatch #1447. October 6, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59, Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

republics hemisphere which value their sovereign independence. Consequently we consider firm action by UK in this British territory should be regarded with genuine satisfaction American Republics..."<sup>119</sup>

In order to maintain an active interest in British Guiana, Secretary of State Dulles then seized upon the occasion to express the Department's concerns about US nationals in British Guiana. He then authorised Maddox to visit British Guiana and suggested that an officer from the Department would join him if he felt that "there would be advantages."<sup>120</sup>

At this same time Dulles sent a cable to the American Embassy, London asking the Ambassador to:

"Make usual representation regarding protection United States interests and nationals in British Guiana. FYI 150 United States nationals believed present in Colony.

"Inquire if British feel situation warrants warning to United States nationals regarding evacuation and request them let us know urgently if such action warranted in future.

"Request full background regarding emergency powers and effect on constitutional arrangements."<sup>121</sup>

The Department of State had not been put off by the lack of consultation on the part of the British Government. The Department continued to pursue its course of activities. From its perspectives, communism had arrived in the US backyard and the Department had been determined to root it out. On 6 October 1953, Aldrich at the US Embassy, London had reported to the Department on the British Cabinet's decisions on British Guiana.<sup>122</sup> What we see also was that from this time on, the British Government, had begun seeking the assistance of the Department of State

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<sup>119</sup> Dulles' cable to "All American Diplomatic Posts in the Other American Republics," Circular #150. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives. The Department had also expressed the following in the same cable: "FYI, only, we have expressed deep concern to British re developments and opinion/situation should be met with great firmness."

<sup>120</sup> Dulles' cable to Maddox. 6 October 1953. DOS Decimal Files: 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>122</sup> See Parliamentary debates on the situation of British Guiana leading up to the suspension of its Constitution on 9 Sept. 1953 and the after effects in CAB 129/63; 30 Sept 1953, CAB 128/26/2, CC 54(53)4, 2 Oct, in Ashton & Killingray (eds), *British Documents on the End of Empire*. Series B, Vol. 6. *Op. Cit.*.

as expressed in the following statement: "UK Government...would welcome any supporting statement Department might feel appropriate after British Government announcement."<sup>123</sup> The Department had correctly anticipated that the British Government would need its assistance and hence had already informed all American Diplomatic Posts in the Latin American Republics about the stance the Department would take.<sup>124</sup>

On October 8, 1953, the Department received a draft copy of the text of a statement that the British Government planned to release on October 9, 1953.<sup>125</sup> On this same day, Mr. Galbraith had sought clarification from Mr. Beale at the Department of State as to whether the British had taken action solely because of their concern about developments in British Guiana.<sup>126</sup> This had followed the statement that Colonial Secretary Lyttleton had made to Parliament; "no representations of any kind were received from the US Government before Her Majesty's Government made their decision."

#### **n. President Eisenhower and the National Security Council**

On 7 October 1953, two days before the British Government suspended British Guiana's constitution, the US National Security Council, at its 165<sup>th</sup> meeting, presided over by President Eisenhower, considered as the first item of business: "Significant World Developments Affecting US Security". At this meeting, Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence, briefed the Council on the situation in British Guiana and noted that it was a major source of the world's supply of bauxite. He said that the leader of the dominant party in the new government of British Guiana was an American-born Communist whose East Indian husband was the head of the Peoples' Progressive Party. Allen Dulles therefore recognised Janet Jagan as a communist and considered her the leader

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<sup>123</sup> Aldrich's memorandum to Secretary of State, Dispatch #1455, October 6, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59; Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>124</sup> Dulles' cable, #150, Oct. 5, 1953. *Op. Cit.* in fn. 116.

<sup>125</sup> Cable from Aldrich transmitting draft text of the British Statement to announce the suspension of British Guiana's Constitution planned for October 9, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>126</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Beale (BNA) and Galbraith (UP) at the Dept. of State, October 9, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

of the dominant party. In his mind, she would have had considerable influence on the shaping of Government policies. He then expressed his position on British action in the following statement:

“Actually this party was Communist and it had secured a majority in the elections held last April. The Communist influence had grown rapidly ever since and the British had now intervened with armed force. The existence of two British battalions in Jamaica, together with the warships of the British West Indies Station, were sufficient to maintain order.”<sup>127</sup>

The records of the meeting of the NSC at this point shows 13 lines deleted on security grounds. The NSC then went on to record the following decision: “Noted an oral briefing by the Director of Central Intelligence on the subject, with specific reference to the situation in British Guiana.”<sup>128</sup>

## 0. Media Comments

On 7 October, 1953, the Daily Chronicle carried a story, "US May Reoccupy Base ..." <sup>129</sup> It cited an American news commentator as having said the previous night that US forces will re-occupy the Base in British Guiana if the British Government failed to take steps to stop the Communist advance in British Guiana. According to the Commentator, "British Guiana is a gateway to South America and is vital to the protection of the Panama Canal." The US Consul General denied this story two days later. Arriving in the colony in the midst of the British activity in suspending the Constitution and landing British troops, Maddox told the Daily Chronicle :

"... that the US Government was interested in the security and well-being of the people of the area and as Consul for the Colony he was here to follow-up developments. He said there was no truth in the rumours that the US would re-occupy the air base at Atkinson Field, and also denied that the United States had brought pressure to bear on Great Britain to send out troops and warships to British Guiana."

"...However, in keeping with the relationship maintained between Britain and the US there must have been consultations over British Guiana between the two countries."

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<sup>127</sup> Eisenhower Papers, 1953-61, Ann Whitman file. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid..

<sup>129</sup> Article: "US May Reoccupy Base." the Daily Chronicle. Georgetown, Guyana. p. 7.



“...However, the US is concerned about communists and other persons who are engaged in subversive activities.”<sup>130</sup>

## 5. International Reactions

The Daily Mail on October 9, 1953 carried a report citing sources as claiming that “...anxieties of US Government played a not inconsiderable part in Britain’s decision to send troops to British Guiana.” Aldrich of the US Embassy in London, advised the Department of State that a spokesman would deny the report.<sup>131</sup>

According to the New York Times of 10 October, as British troops were landing in British Guiana, Mr Arthur Gardner, the new American Ambassador to Cuba declared that the British Guiana situation was a particular one, requiring surgery, and expressed the belief that this would never be necessary again.

The Hindustan Times carried an article by Labour MP, Fenner Brockway, that demanded Colonial Secretary Lyttleton’s indictment before the United Nations as a danger to world peace and security. The US Embassy in Delhi reported: “We see the Indian affinity with the Indians in British Guiana. The Indians in British Guiana came from India to work on the sugar plantations. The Indian Commission in British Guiana had represented them. Together with the Indian Express they blamed the State Department for British action saying that ‘...the US feared the emergence of Communism on American continent...’” The article further stated: “...Mr. and Mrs. Jagan undoubtedly Communists or near Communists...”<sup>132</sup>

The Department of State took particular note of the interest of the Indian Government over British Guiana. The Indian Government had asked the Department of State to confirm whether or not the US Government had put pressure on the British Government to suspend British Guiana’s constitution. The Department replied in the following terms:

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<sup>130</sup> Maddox’s Report of Oct. 13, 1953 to Dept. of State, DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>131</sup> Aldrich’s Report, US Embassy, London, to Secretary of State. Oct. 9, 1953. #1517. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954; RG 59. Box 3542. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>132</sup> Allen’s Report from AMEMBASSY, New Delhi. # 624. Oct. 12, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954; RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

“United States Government did not RPT NOT put ‘pressure’ on British and did not RPT NOT suggest despatch warships or troops to Colony nor did it request such action in interest protection of Atkinson Field. Air Force Base Atkinson Field, deactivated August 1949 and presently operated by British Guiana government as civilian airfield. There are no United States personnel at Atkinson.”

“However, the United States has been gravely concerned British Guiana situation believing PPP clearly Commie oriented. Is gratified United Kingdom decided upon firm action to meet threat to stability of Colony which if unchecked had implications developing into threat to security this hemisphere.”<sup>133</sup>

The Department of State tried to plead its case with the Indian Government in its follow-up cable on October 17, 1953. It mentioned the arrogance displayed by the PPP Ministers; the threatening and unruly behaviour of PPP mobs outside the Assembly; PPP contempt and disrespect for Governor Savage and other high officials. There had been mention of Janet Jagan being a member of a ‘Young Commie League’ in the United States, among others. The Report concluded thus:

“Total evidence lead us conclude definite plan existed establish Commie bridgehead in Colony with implications idea make of Colony a Commie center at least for Caribbean and possibly more general Western Hemisphere operations. People Progressive Party policy statements closely parallel Moscow line...”<sup>134</sup>

Despite all the efforts of the Department of State, several of the Indian media condemned British action. The Hindustan Standard took the following position:

“What the political complexion of the dismissed Guianese Ministers is or what blood-curdling things they would have done is worthless pleas. It is trotted out solely for defending colonial rule by fraud and violence...”<sup>135</sup>

The Indian Statesman, in an editorial, accepted the thesis of a communist plot in British Guiana but stated that British action could have been less drastic. The editorial went on to compare the conduct of Cheddi Jagan’s ‘ministry’ to that of Bustamante’s of Jamaica.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Smith’s cable for Dulles to AMEMBASSY, New Delhi, Oct. 16, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3545. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>134</sup> Smith’s Cable, Oct. 17, 1953 to AMEMBASSY, New Delhi. Loc. Cit in note 128 above.

<sup>135</sup> AMEMBASSY, New Delhi, Report to Dept. of State, “Indian Interest in Events in British Guiana.” 5 Nov. 53. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. .

<sup>136</sup> The Statesman, editorial of October 28, 1953. AMEMBASSY, New Delhi, dispatch to Dept. of State. 5 November, 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-54. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

Following Cheddi Jagan's appeal to Prime Minister Nehru for support of the independence of British Guiana, the American Consul in Delhi reported that Nehru had replied to Communist members in the Indian Council as follows:

"Indian Government does not propose raise any question General Assembly. Said rare thing for a country take up matter affecting other countries; create legal constitutional difficulties..."<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, Nehru had condemned colonialism saying that it had "exhausted itself."<sup>138</sup>

The US policy on British Guiana was widely praised by several prominent national papers:

The Herald Tribune editorial of 11 October 1953 had this to say of US fears:

"...the United States government has asserted that it would be gravely concerned at the threat to the security of the hemisphere which would arise if British Guiana fell victim to the international communist conspiracy."<sup>139</sup>

Faced with the threat of a communist beachhead in British Guiana, running in parallel with the Guatemala situation, the United States Government openly praised the action of the British government under Prime Minister Churchill to suspend the constitution. A Daily Mail correspondent reporting from Georgetown on October 9, 1953 wrote:

"It is reported here reliably that the anxieties of the US Government played a not inconsiderable part in Britain's decision to send troops to British Guiana. For the Americans have installations built during the war at the Atkinson airfield ..."

The New York Times and the Washington Post supported the US reaction to Britain's decision in the colony. They claimed that the US had economic interests in British Guiana, which had to be protected. Heavy investments had been made in the bauxite industry, deemed crucial to the US arms programme; iron ore and oil vital to Western defences were being developed in Venezuela which bordered along British Guiana, together with other important minerals.<sup>140</sup> Had

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<sup>137</sup> AMEMBASSY, New Delhi, Report to Secretary of State. # 820. 24 Nov., 1953. DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Editorial, "Monroe and Marx," New York Herald Tribune. 11 Oct. 1953. p. 10.

<sup>140</sup> Editorial, "American-British Unity against British Guiana Communism." Baltimore Sun. 11 October 1953.

"communist insurgency" remained an imminent danger to the region, the revival of the Venezuela claim to a large area (about two-thirds) of British Guiana, would be one option the US had in its armoury in order to forestall/combat communist maneuverings across borders. The strategy behind this thinking was to miniaturise a communist Guiana and thereby diminish its mineral potential, or alternatively, lay the foundation for its complete conquest by friends of the West.<sup>141</sup>

Then there were the strategic considerations, as noted by US Congressman Jackson, who had visited British Guiana in September 1953 (a month before the suspension of the constitution). He observed that: "...British Guiana was within the strategic zone of the United States."<sup>142</sup> The Baltimore Sun emphasised the same concerns that British Guiana was too near vital areas and key sea lanes for the American countries and the Western Alliance to see communist manipulations there with any comfort. It praised British action and echoed US support in the following terms:

"The British reaction to the threat of a communist coup in British Guiana has been swift and vigorous. With almost an audible sigh of relief, the American government has expressed its satisfaction at London's ouster of leftwing government men in Guiana and the dispatch of land and naval forces to the British colony.

"The alacrity of the British reaction thus serves North and South American security interests and so the security of the Western Alliance."<sup>143</sup>

David Lawrence of the New York Times reported on Washington's psyche on this issue when he stated that:

"...nobody in the United States is expressing alarm that the British have been too 'impulsive' or 'impatient', and that this is the kind of thing that leads to warmongering' or enlargement of the 'cold war'.

"On the contrary, the United States government, with deep-seated belief in the importance of maintaining good faith in alliances has promptly endorsed the British action and has notified all Latin American governments that such endorsement has been given. That's unity with a capital 'U'.

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141 A. Chase, *Guyana: A Nation in Transit. Burnham's Role*. Georgetown: Pavnikpress, Bel Air Park: Guiana. 1994, p. 14.

142 Loc. Cit., in fn. 135 above. See also Donald Jackson's Report on the Special Study Mission to Latin America. Op. Cit., fn. 106.

143 Ibid..

" The British government now has come to believe that the "Left-wing" People's Progressive Party in British Guiana isn't just a political party but a treasonable conspiracy."<sup>144</sup>

A few days later, the New York Times again expressed US approval for British action in the following statement: "the British Government's move to forestall a possible communist coup is undoubtedly wise. A considerable period of orderly evolution may well be a good prescription for this promising but under-developed part of the world"

On 20 October 1953, the Daily Chronicle carried a story, "Britain will not permit colonies to be dominated by Reds." The story was datelined Providence, Rhode Island, October 19, 1953. It said that Sir Roger Makin, British Ambassador to the United States in an address to the English Speaking Union and the World Affairs Council had said that Britain had no intention of permitting any of her colonies to be dominated by Communists. Britain and the United States had a particular duty to ensure the new nations emerging into statehood were politically stable and economically strong enough to resist the propaganda and overtures of countries whose ways are hostile to US. He added: "We have a recent reminder of how onerous and painful this duty may be in action which we have had to take in British Guiana. There the popularly-elected Government came under the control of the Communists."

The following day, 21 October, the Daily Chronicle carried a story, "Maddox: Danger of Communism Checked in B.G.":

"The danger of a Communist dominated element attaining complete power in British Guiana has been checked, Mr W.P. Maddox, United States Consul-General in Trinidad said today.

"Mr Maddox, just back from Georgetown, added it was generally recognized that British Guiana faces a tremendous reconstruction task especially in view of the economic, financial and administrative set-back the Colony had recently suffered.

"Hope, however, for the future is beginning to reappear as the great majority of the people are responding wholeheartedly to the Government's appeal for cooperation and support."

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144 D. Lawrence, "Today in Washington," New York Times, 15 October 1953.

## Conclusion

From the materials reviewed in this chapter, we may offer the following conclusions. Like the UK, the US followed communist-leaning agitation in British Guiana from the late 1940s. At one stage American diplomats even asked the local police for information on the communist leanings of local politicians. This confirms that even the decolonisation process was viewed through Cold War lens.

The US had significant economic, as well as, political and military interests in British Guiana. British Guiana was an important supplier of bauxite and the Americans had a military base in the colony. Developments in British Guiana could influence the course of events in the Caribbean.

The US Consul, therefore, followed the situation in the colony closely and kept in close contact with the Governor. Two days before the suspension of the Constitution of British Guiana in October 1953, CIA Director, Allen Dulles, provided a briefing to President Eisenhower and the National Security Council about the communist danger posed by the PPP.

The American media was also sounding warnings about a communist threat in British Guiana and American Trades Unions took a leading role in countering the anti-communist threat of communism in British Guiana. By his own accounts, Serafino Romualdi of the AFL-CIO began to mobilise against a communist danger in British Guiana already in 1951.

As the Americans and the British geared up to counter a feared communist danger in British Guiana, the trades unions in the UK and the USA would mobilise against communism as well. In the next chapter we shall look at their roles in British Guiana between 1953 and 1966.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **UK AND US TRADE UNIONS ANTI-COMMUNIST INVOLVEMENT IN BRITISH GUIANA, 1953-1966**

## 1. Introduction

In this thesis overall, we examine how, during the period 1953-1966 the British and American Governments feared the danger of a communist state in an independent British Guiana and joined efforts to prevent that from happening. Although Cheddi Jagan and his People's Progressive Party (PPP) had won in fair elections in 1953, he was removed from office after only 133 days when the British Government suspended the constitution in order, it claimed, to prevent "a dangerous crisis both in public order and in economic affairs, and to forestall communist subversion of the Government".

In this chapter, we shall look at the role of British and American trades unions. We shall seek to show that the Trades Unions of these two countries helped identify the communist threat, helped to combat it, using local trades unions against the government of Cheddi Jagan, and joined forces with their respective governments in fighting against the perceived communist threat. It is noteworthy that the British TUC selected British Guiana as the first colony to receive special assistance for the promotion of a healthy and vigorous trade union movement.

## 2. Background: The Trade Union Scene in British Guiana, 1953 - 1966

Lancelot Hogben, the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana, wrote in 1964:

"Since Castro's supporters overthrew one of the several unsavoury New World regimes which owe a precarious tenancy to the patronage of the State Department in Washington, the Caribbean has become a hot spot in the Cold War; and British Guiana is now one of the hottest. In its newest adaptation of the Monroe doctrine, the State Department has as its willing ally the self-styled free trade unions of the United States. To understand fully the strategic significance of the Caribbean scene in the nuclear era, it is therefore necessary to take stock of their financial influence on the Guyanese industrial Labour movement."<sup>1</sup>

It is generally known that from the early 1950s, following the establishment of the People's Progressive Party, until the country's independence on 26 May, 1966, labour issues had

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<sup>1</sup> L. Hogben, "Foreword" in A. Chase, *A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana, 1900 to 1961*. Ruimveldt: New Guyana Co. Ltd., 1964. Foreword was signed in June, 1964 from Tregeiriog, N. Wales.



been used by nationalist leaders in their political struggles, while the British and American governments used local trades unions - to which they gave financial and other support – in support of their charges that the Peoples' Progressive Party was communist and in defence of free trades unions.

Following the establishment of the PPP in 1950, it initially worked closely with the trades unions. As Ashton Chase put it, “. . . the PPP and the trade unions worked together, planned together and struggled together to uproot privilege and a decadent political and economic system.” He attributed this cooperation to the fact that at the inception of the PPP “many of the trade unions were under class conscious leadership.”<sup>2</sup>

In January 1951, both the British Guiana Trades Union Council (BGTUC) and the PPP picketed the Parliament building (The Public Building) over the Government's tax proposals. In September, 1951, the PPP sponsored demonstrations against the rise in cost-of-living and high unemployment. In July 1951, the BGTUC and the PPP joined in opposing a Government draft circular proposing to prohibit civil servants and government employees from taking part in politics. In August, 1951, the BGTUC announced its decision to form a Labour Party. Some trade unionists felt that they should have their own Labour Party. The party was never established.

Early in 1952, the BGTUC and the PPP joined in protesting against a motion moved in the Legislative Council by Lionel Luckhoo, a leading 'anti-communist', to ban 'subversive literature'. This motion became the “Undesirable Publications Ordinance” under which the Government was empowered to ban any books, documents and materials it considered subversive. The Archbishop of the West Indies announced in the State Council in 1953, “With all my heart I have revolted against this Ordinance” since it first appeared in the form of a Bill for “This is an infringement of the liberty of the individual. This is not just restraint. If absolute freedom is license, then this is tyranny.”<sup>3</sup> This gives an idea of the mood of the times.

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<sup>2</sup> A. Chase, *Op. Cit.*, p. 177.

In July 1952, the PPP and the BGTUC staged a joint demonstration against unemployment. Towards the end of 1952, the Legislative Council passed a Bill to regulate and control the collection of money and the sale of articles for charitable or other purposes from house to house and in streets and other public places. The trade unions claimed that the Bill was aimed at prohibiting 'tag day' and May Day collections as well as relief for strikers. The significance of this lies in the fact that up to this period and for many years yet to come, the Unions were not financially strong enough to conduct strikes on their own resources. Moreover, no Union had a strike fund of any consequence. To maintain strikers, "union activists had to be out in the streets with their tins and lists to solicit donations, sometimes within the very first week of the strike."<sup>4</sup> This also gives an idea of the mood of the times.

During this period there was a long-running dispute between the Man Power Citizen Association (MPCA) and the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU) for representation of workers in the sugar industry. In 1948 the GIWU had demanded recognition from the Sugar Producers' Association (SPA). In November 1952, the GIWU called a strike for recognition on the sugar estates on the East Coast Demerara, where it had strong support. During this strike the MPCA asked the SPA for the 'check-off' system<sup>5</sup> but the request was refused. With this, it claimed, it would be able to launch a full-scale counter-offensive against the GIWU.

The MPCA was, at this time, outside the British Guiana Trade Union Council. It did, however, become an affiliate of the Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers (ORIT) during 1952. For Ashton Chase, the leading author on the history of trades unions in British Guiana, after 33 years of independent existence and without any help or support from the American trades union movement, even in its most difficult days, "the trade union movement found the American

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<sup>3</sup> A. Chase. *Op. Cit.*, p, 193.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Under the 'Check-off' system, members' contributions were deducted from their wages by employers. The money was then given to the unions directly. The system was brought into effect in July 1957.

eagle in its house, the MPCA having let it in through the door.”<sup>6</sup> In November 1952, Serafino Romualdi of ORIT announced the establishment of a fully equipped office in British Guiana. At the first General elections under the new, internal self-government constitution on 27 April, 1953, the PPP had won 18 of the 24 seats in the House of Assembly. The PPP manifesto had set out its belief that trades unions which had the confidence of the majority of workers in an industry or service should be recognised to bargain for and on behalf of these workers. It undertook to secure observance of this principle “based on the American Labour Relations Act.”

Just before the general elections, at the Conference of the MPCA in February 1953, its President, Lionel Luckhoo, the sponsor of the Undesirable Publications Ordinance, had declared that the MPCA stood for fair play for the workers, and a square deal for capital. In his view, the Union’s relationship with management had been most cordial. The GIWU, for its part, had held its Annual Conference in March. The Conference had called for minimum wages for field and factory workers, and for a plebiscite in the Sugar Industry to determine which Union was the workers’ choice.

On 31 August 1953, the GIWU had called a general strike on the sugar estates over claims for increase in wages and improvement in conditions of employment. It had lasted for 25 days. It had ended when the newly elected PPP government, of which Ashton Chase was the Minister of Labour, gave an undertaking that it would immediately introduce and pass a Labour Relations Bill to provide for the compulsory recognition of trades unions by the workers through a secret poll.

This had been the thrust of the Labour Relations Bill introduced on 29 September 1953. The Bill had been supported by the BGTUC and the GIWU. The MPCA and the SPA had opposed the Bill, but it had been passed on 8 October, 1953. On 9 October, the Constitution had been suspended and the Bill lapsed. The Robertson Commission would subsequently comment:

“The MPCA has always found it difficult to rebut the charges of weakness and inefficiency. Its tasks of organising and dealing speedily with the complaints of sugar workers employed on estates spread thinly along a long and broken coast line are

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<sup>6</sup> A. Chase, *Op. Cit.*, p. 206.

undoubtedly far beyond its meagre resources. It has, we believe, on occasion accepted money from sugar companies for some special purposes.”<sup>7</sup>

In suspending the Constitution the British Government would make the Labour Relations Bill one of the main grounds of its charges of communism against the PPP leaders. For Ashton Chase, the author of the Bill,

The basic principles adumbrated in the Bill were to be found in similar legislation in the USA and in the Provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, Canada. In Jamaica and later in British Honduras the system of a poll to determine union recognition was voluntarily put into practice. It is a safeguard against skeleton unions, company unions and bubble unions.<sup>8</sup>

Following the suspension of the Constitution, in the politically charged atmosphere of the time, and with direct British rule having been re-instituted, the BGTUC was dissolved on 30 September 1953. A successor Trades Union Council was registered on 11 December, 1953. In the creation of the new Trades Union Council it was stipulated that any trade union directly or indirectly affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions or the Caribbean Labour Congress was ineligible for membership. A similar restriction was placed against association with any other organisation the Executive of the TUC considered undesirable. For Chase, the TUC remained a body unrepresentative of the majority of workers until 1956.<sup>9</sup>

In the meantime, Mr. George Woodcock of the British Trades Union Congress, who in 1954 had been a member of the Robertson Commission, had returned to the Colony in January 1955 and had announced that the BTUC had selected this country as the first colony to receive special assistance – financial and advisory – for the promotion of a healthy and vigorous trade union movement.<sup>10</sup> The MPCA was selected as the nucleus to start this drive and Mr. Andrew Dalglish was to be resident in the country in an advisory capacity. According to Chase, Dalglish “came and rendered valuable assistance in guiding the movement in straightforward trade union lines.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A. Chase. A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana. *Op. Cit.*, p. 311.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Direct British rule in British Guiana would last from 1953 to 1957. From 1957 to 1961, the PPP would again return to power under a curtailed constitution. While it remained under observation, the period was fairly tranquil on the labour front. However, following its third election victory in 1961 there would be major disturbances in 1962, 1963 and 1964 in which the trade union movement would be heavily involved. The trouble in 1962 arose over the proposed budget, that of 1963 over the Labour Relations Bill and those of 1964 out of a countrywide sugar workers strike. In 1964 the PPP, while winning the plurality of votes in the General Elections, would not be asked by Governor Luyt to form a Government and would pass from Government until 1992. After 1964 the system of proportional representation and, as will be seen in Chapter 8 below, a series of fraudulent elections kept the PPP out of office. This would change only after the end of the Cold War when the USA and the UK felt that it no longer represented a threat of the spread of communism and as the American and British Governments were pushing for democratic governance globally. Even then, it was only with the intervention of former President Jimmy Carter that the PNC government agreed not to rig the elections and to accept the verdict of the electorate.

In the sections following we shall look more closely at the role of American and British Trades Unions during the period 1953 to 1964. For purposes of comparison it is instructive to refer to Chase who commented on the extent to which the BGTUC depended on external financial assistance. He notes that "The extent was matched by the subservience of the TUC to ORIT and the American Unions."<sup>12</sup>

The MPCA'S financial position at the beginning of this period was very shaky. In 1950, 1951 and 1952 its year-end bank balance stuck at G\$ 12.29. Its membership in these years was around 6000. At 31st December 1953 its bank balance was raised to G\$ 1,436.63 – up to that time the highest year end bank balance it had ever had since its formation. On the other hand, its membership in 1953 was around 4,000 and in 1954 – 2,075. The financial membership for 1955

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<sup>12</sup> A. Chase. Op. Cit., p.215.

and 1956 was under 4,500. The transformation of the MPCA had been wrought principally by massive financial assistance from overseas.<sup>13</sup>

Against this background, we shall now turn, first, to the involvement of the British Trades Union Congress in British Guiana (BTUC) and then to the role of the AFL-CIO.

### 3. The British Trades Union Congress

The evidence available convincingly indicates that once the British Government had identified a communist threat in British Guiana, the British TUC immediately joined in the charges against Cheddi Jagan and the PPP, helped propagate the charges, and joined in the anti-communist campaign, providing support to "anti-communist" trades unions in British Guiana.

It may be noted that in the Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission, 1950-51, the Waddington Commission had found that "...Absorption in politics is clearly to be seen in the Trade Union movement, where this aspect of labour organisation has sometimes been stressed at the expense of the industrial."<sup>14</sup> The importance of keeping trades unions free from political influences was stressed by delegates attending the 35th International Labour Conference in Geneva in the summer of 1952. The declaration on trades unionism stated the necessity of a free and independent movement in each country, able to carry forward its economic and social mission regardless of political changes. The declaration urged that, "ties with political parties should not hamper the unions' freedom of action nor should governments seek to transform the Trades Union Movement into an instrument for the pursuance of political aims."<sup>15</sup> Though British Guiana was not then an independent country it was governed by British laws and the UK - which was a member of the International Labour Organisation. The preservation of free and independent trades unions was one of the factors motivating the historical anti-communism of the British TUC. The Trades Union

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<sup>13</sup> A. Chase. *Op. Cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>14</sup> *Report of the Constitutional Commission 1950-1951*. No. 280, 1951. London. HMSO. para. 54.

<sup>15</sup> Article, "Keep Unions Free, 60 Nations Agree." *Labour*. August 1952. Vol. 2. No, 12. London. BTUC.

Movement, in the words of Mr. T. O'Brien, MP, while Presiding over the 1953 TUC, was the "strongest bulwark of democracy."<sup>16</sup>

British trades unionists played a part in identifying a communist threat in British Guiana as we shall see below.

**a. Identification of The Communist Threat**

In the aftermath of the election and overthrow of Cheddi Jagan in October 1953, the British Conservative Government, in 1954, charged that the People's Progressive Party had been a disruptive force in the colony, and that the PPP Government had tried to undermine the authority of the MPCA by trying to force Governor Savage to accept the Guiana Industrial Workers Union (GIWU) as the recognised Union of all workers.<sup>17</sup> The report lamented that some unions "suffered from being the cockpits of personal political ambitions."<sup>18</sup> After the election of Cheddi Jagan of the PPP as Chief Minister, the BTUC warned that the PPP, "far from encouraging legitimate trade unionism set itself the target of destroying the Man Power Citizen's Association which is affiliated with the IFCTU."<sup>19</sup> The third World Congress of the latter, in Stockholm in 1953, let it be known that "the fight to restore freedom is one to be fought on the South American front too..."<sup>20</sup> In his vein, the BTUC noted that Jagan had formed the Industrial Worker's Union "to foster his own ends", having failed to gain complete control of the MPCA:

"The position of the British TUC was that it had supported the movement towards self-government, and looked forward to the steady advancement in the best interests of the people of the Colony under the guidance of their representatives elected on the basis of universal suffrage. In 1952 it had viewed such proposals as welcome for they 'may yield a useful industrial by-product'. Political advance could stimulate the growth of the trade union movement which in the last ten years has made steady

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<sup>16</sup> Article, "Keep Unions Free, 60 Nations Agree." *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>17</sup> *The British Guiana Constitutional Commission Report, 1954.* . Cmnd. 9274, London. HMSO; para. 50.

<sup>18</sup> British TUC, "Union Role in British Guiana." Commission Report on Events in a Troubled Colony. *Industrial News*. Nov. 12, 1954. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>19</sup> BTUC, "Guiana Three-family Caucus Attacked Free Trade Unions," *Labour*, November 1953, 251; *Industrial News* (TUC Publication for press), No.174, 30 October 1953, p.4. See also "Union's Role in British Guiana," *Industrial News*; No.199, 12 November 1953, pp.1-2, which argues that the "strikes were called for "recognition" of GIWU." However, when the PPP leaders formed the Ministry, they rushed through a Labour Relations Bill, "which ostensibly aimed to give workers the chance to elect which union would represent them but which in fact gave the PPP Minister of Labour the means to make these elections a foregone conclusion." p.2. British TUC, "PPP Threatens the Unions." *Labour*. Nov. 1953. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>20</sup> British TUC, "ICFTU Gains in Strength," *Labour*, August 1953, p. 171. London. BTUC Library.

progress by bringing home to many workers the value of forming and strengthening their own organisations.”<sup>21</sup>

Following the suspension of the Jagan Government on 9 October 1953, the British Trade Union Congress recapitulated its position on British Guiana as follows:

“In consistently advocating self-government of dependent peoples, the General Council have sought the opportunity for leaders of such peoples to recognize and accept the consequent responsibility of utilising the powers and opportunities vested in them to further the well-being of their communities as a whole, on the basis of freedom and dignity and respect for the minority.”<sup>22</sup>

After the suspension of the British Guiana Constitution on 9 October 1953, Circular No.24 of October 1953, of the British TUC regretted that some of the elected representatives of the PPP had pursued a Communist policy and had maintained contacts behind the Iron Curtain and with the World Federation of Trades Unions (WFTU), consisting of ‘non-free’ trade unions, rather than the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions (ICFTU).<sup>23</sup> The circular continued that the BTUC had considered the MPCA to be the only official trade union organisation with collective bargaining agreements that provide for the establishment of joint negotiating machinery which has resulted in considerable improvements in the conditions of sugar workers.”<sup>24</sup>

The General Council of the British TUC clearly expressed its support for British colonial objectives in British Guiana in Circular 24. The General Council noted in November 1953 that it was “deeply disturbed” by the PPP’s attempt to destroy the MPCA and “condemned those Ministers of the People’s Progressive Party who have wantonly abused the trust reposed in them by the peoples of British Guiana.” The General Council of the British TUC pledged its support to the

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21 “Workers in Another Colony May Get a New Chance,” Labour, January 1953, p.135. See also, ‘British Guiana’ Industrial News; No. 174, 1953. p. 4. London. BTUC Library.

22 British Trade Union Congress Report, Circular No.24, 29 October 1953. Cmnd. 9274. London. BTUC Library.

23 Consistent with its fear of Communism the British TUC left the WFTU and was instrumental in forming the IFCTU in 1949. It noted in 1954, “that while the ICFTU representation is based on trade union membership irrespective of creed, colour or politics, the WFTU is overwhelmingly of Communist delegates from Communist trade unions in Communist countries, and its policy slavishly followed the Kremlin line and has accorded unqualified support to every aspect of Cominform policy... In all communist countries the trade unions are not free and independent organisations.” British TUC, “The TUC and the WFTU,” Statement of General Council, Supplement to Section G of the General Council’s Report to the 1954 Congress . London. British TUC Library.

24 BTUC, “PPP Threatens The Unions,” Labour. November 1953, p. 243. British Trades Union Congress Report. Circular No.24. 29 October 1953. London. BTUC Library.



peoples of British Guiana, and to “accord every possible aid, particularly the maintenance of a free trade union movement.”<sup>25</sup>

The attitude of the British Trades Union Congress at the time is indicated by its refusal of permission to the Trades Councils to sponsor a public meeting by Cheddi Jagan in London in October 1953. Following the suspension of the British Guiana Constitution in October 1953, the Peoples Progressive Party had tried to seek a platform in London for Cheddi Jagan to give his side of the story. The PPP had approached the London Branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC), to arrange sponsorship for some public meetings in London. The CLC then approached some Trades Councils which referred the request to the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress for consideration. In a spirit of solidarity with the MPCA of British Guiana, the General Council refused the request. The General Council charged that the London Branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress was “communist controlled” and that it was not associated with a bona fide union movement in the Caribbean.<sup>26</sup> It added that while it had an office in Jamaica, it “[had] no claim to represent Caribbean trade union opinion.”<sup>27</sup> The General Council was also disturbed by developments in the British Guiana trades union movement. What appeared worrisome to the General Council was that “The trade union movement has been too much used by would-be politicians as a means for obtaining power, and not as a way of improving the conditions of labour; too many presidents and officials of trades unions are mere politicians.”<sup>28</sup> In this same vein, Mr. Thomas Reid, Labour MP from Swindon and Member of the TUC’s Colonial Advisory Board aptly noted in a debate in Parliament in October 1953 that the power of the PPP rested with a “three-family caucus”: Cheddi Jagan, former Chief Minister; Janet Jagan, former Deputy Speaker; Latchmarsingh, former Health Minister and one of his cousins, Mr. Singh, was Local Government Minister and the Burnham family, which also had three people connected with the Government.

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<sup>25</sup> British TUC, “The TUC and Communism.” *Op. Cit.*, p. 3. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>26</sup> V. Tewson’s letter to Secretaries of Affiliated Organisations, Trade Councils and Trades Council Federations, 29 October 1953. Box: JL 862. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>27</sup> BTUC, “Trades Councils Warned About Caribbean Labour Congress,” *Industrial News*. No.175, 13 November 1953, p. 1. London. BTUC Library.

Forbes Burnham was Minister of Education. A cousin, Sidney King was Minister of Housing while his sister, Miss Jessie Burnham, was member of the Legislature.<sup>29</sup>

'Loyalty', or a sense of 'belonging', two important criteria which, according to the General Council, characterised the British Trades Union Movement, were lacking in the British Guiana trade union movement. The General Council observed that their absence afforded a window of opportunity to unscrupulous individuals to form rival unions in order to undermine an established one.<sup>30</sup> This was in reference to the MPCA. The caustic remarks reserved for the PPP leaders were expressed in the following manner: "...the People's Progressive Party emerged as a ruthless group, calculatingly using the machinery of a Governmental system to bring about its ultimate collapse."<sup>31</sup>

In this situation, the British TUC sought to support local friendly unions.

#### **b. Support to the Local Trades Unions**

The BTUC, which had been supporting the trades union movement in the West Indies for a long time, sought to combat the communist threat in British Guiana by co-opting the BGTUC and other regional organisations. The Waddington Commission Report of September 1951 had drawn attention to the difficulties that the BGTUC was undergoing at the time and it had expressed its doubts that the PPP (not yet in government) were going to change its attitude. The report had alerted the Colonial Office and the British TUC to the danger that the trades unions could be used by their officers to undermine their influence.<sup>32</sup> That month, labour officials from the Colonial territories gathered at a conference in London from 24 September to 5 October, and they expressed their

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<sup>28</sup> BTUC Memorandum of 16 December 1954. International Dept. Circular No. 37 (1954-1955). London. BTUC Library.

<sup>29</sup> British TUC, "Guiana Three-Family Caucus Attacked Free Trade Unions," Labour, November 1953, p.251. London. BTUC.

<sup>30</sup> BTUC Memorandum, 16 Dec. 1954. International Department, Circular No. 37 (1954-1955). London. BTUC Library.

“appreciation of the role of the TUC in helping Colonial trade union movements, and they expressed the high prestige in which the British Trades Union Movement was held in their territories.”<sup>33</sup>

For the BTUC, “a direct and enduring link” with the West Indies had been forged in 1924, when Dominion representatives and Hubert Critchlow, founder of the British Guiana Labour Union, had met in Wembley, London. It had resulted in the first British Commonwealth Labour Conference.<sup>34</sup> In 1939, Sir Walter Citrine of the BTUC had noted that Trades Union Councils had been established in Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, British Guiana and Trinidad. He felt that “they [the BTUC] had to give special attention to the West Indies and he wanted “to give the people in the West Indies the impression that their interests are being looked after here.”<sup>35</sup> Sir Walter was concerned about the “vast amount of poverty in the West Indies”:

“Housing conditions are atrocious and the natives, both West Indians and East Indians, are generally speaking, treated as serfs by the planters. There is an almost complete absence of protective legislation and neither politically nor in any other way are the working people afforded any real opportunity of improving their conditions...labour is without direct votes... Wages are abominably low and vary from 3s.9d. a day in the public works department of Jamaica, to as low as 1s.3d. in Barbados...I think it worthwhile giving specialised attention to the Trade Union and Labour problems of the West Indies.”<sup>36</sup>

Subsequently, in view of improving the leadership of trade union movements in the West Indies, the BTUC offered two scholarships to young trade unionists in the West Indies for a period of study at Ruskin College.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the British TUC sent an advisor to reside in the West Indies for a period of time to assist trade union leaders in developing organisational skills which were very important in order for the unions to become effective. British Guiana was one of the three

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31 BTUC, Summary of the Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission 1954, Cmnd. 9274. Box: JL682. London. BTUC Library.

32 British Guiana. Report of the Constitutional Commission, 1950-51. Colonial No. 280. HMSO, 1951.

33 BTUC, Industrial News. No.126, 19 October 1951. p.2. London. BTUC Library.

34 “The TUC and the West India Royal Commission,” paper for discussion on 30 June, University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, c.1926. Marjorie Nicholson’s collection, 972/3. London. BTUC Library.

35 “Memorandum of Interview,” 11.15 to 12.15, 23 May, 1939, TUC Reference, KMS/382. File No. 972. London. BTUC Library.

36 Sir Walter Citrine, “Trade Unionism in the West Indies,” Industrial News; 3 May 1939. Marjorie Nicholson collection, File 972. London. BTUC Library.

37 BTUC, “Report of Trade Union Congress,” 1940, p.159. London. BTUC Library.

colonies considered to be of importance for such assistance. In 1951 the TUC reported that among 400 officers at work in the colonies, "there are ex-civil servants from Britain's Ministry of Labour, former colonial civil servants and men who had gained their experience in the Trade Union Movement in this country." Moreover, "[f]rom the Colonial Office in London, the staff of these Colonial departments get guidance and help."<sup>38</sup>

By 1953 there were several recognised trade unions representing the various industries in British Guiana.<sup>39</sup> The most important among them were the MPCA and the SPA. Together they formed the backbone of workers' representation for regulating working conditions. The officially registered unions were affiliated to the BGTUC, which in turn was affiliated to the British TUC, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (created by the BTUC in 1949 to counter the WFTU), the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) and the Inter-American Regional Organisation (ORIT).

Following the 1953 general disturbances in British Guiana the BTUC concluded that the trade union movement in British Guiana was not a cohesive organisation and therefore was not capable of dealing with the problems it faced during the 1953 crisis. It thereafter determined that the immediate deficiency in the local movement in British Guiana was due to the lack of organisation. The British TUC believed that not enough was done to protect the British Guianese workers' rights. The events which had evolved in the colony during the 133 days of Cheddi Jagan's first government, served as signals to the British TUC of the dangers the British Guiana trades union movement would encounter when "...faced with unscrupulous individuals, ... and would-be politicians as a means of obtaining power, and not as a way of improving the conditions of labour."<sup>40</sup>

In May 1953, shortly after the PPP Government took office, it had introduced a Labour Relations Bill in September 1953. The Bill had provoked industrial unrest and the assessment of the British TUC was that the PPP was seeking to put pressure on Governor Savage to accept the

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<sup>38</sup> BTUC, "Report of Trade Union Congress," 1940, p.159. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>39</sup> BTUC, "Report of the Department of Labour, 1948." In 1947 and 1948 there were 33 and 42 respectively, officially recognised unions affiliated to the BGTUC. Boxes HD 8392 and 1948. London. BTUC Library

Bill. From the BTUC point of view, the PPP Government's actions were undemocratic. The BTUC stated that Cheddi Jagan's government was trying to make the trade union movement subservient to its wishes.<sup>41</sup>

Having recognised the deficiencies of the BGTUC, the British TUC decided that the former had to be strengthened in order to be able to resist capitulating to 'unscrupulous' politicians whose aims were questionable. The means of assistance took various forms to meet the 'crises' in subsequent years as events unfolded.

At a meeting held in the Council Chamber of the BTUC, London on 19 November 1954, and attended by Representatives of the Overseas Employers Federation, the British TUC and the Colonial Office, it was decided to make the MPCA the principal Trades Union in British Guiana. The idea was, firstly, to make it a "working model" by adopting British trade union practices to meet the circumstances of British Guiana, and secondly, to effectively represent the industrial workers.<sup>42</sup> The BTUC had considered the MPCA to be the most democratically constructed of the unions in British Guiana and also it had some negotiating experience to its credit.<sup>43</sup>

It was therefore to this end that, in December 1954, the General Council of the British TUC allocated three thousand pounds with promises of further aid 'as the needs arise.' It also decided to send one of its most knowledgeable and capable trade unionists, Andrew Dalglish, to assist the BGTUC to strengthen its organisational skills.<sup>44</sup> The urgency was compounded by the imminent departure of Shakoor, then the General Secretary, and who the BTUC described as 'the most astute man in the BGTUC.' The hopes of the BTUC were, "...to contribute towards conditions which will enable the people of British Guiana to resume their advance to constitutional self-government and

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<sup>40</sup> Summary of the "Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Commission 1954." Cmnd. 9274. 18 November 1954. London. HMSO.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Minutes of meeting between representatives of Overseas Employers Federation, the British TUC and the Colonial Office, 19 November 1954. Marjorie Nicholson's collection, File 932.52. London. BTUC Library

<sup>43</sup> BTUC Pamphlet. "What the TUC is doing." 1955. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum of a meeting of the British TUC, 16 December 1954. REF:VT/DB/T/365, Marjorie Nicholson's collection. London. BTUC Library.

take their place as full partners in the Commonwealth of Nations.” Andrew Dalglish’s Report of January 1955 on his visit to British Guiana confirmed the concerns of the BTUC of the disarray within the BGTUC.<sup>45</sup>

Dalglish’s initial priorities were to give lectures on trade unionism, supervise the courses offered by trained local unionists, monitor union expenditures, to assess the Unions’ effectiveness in attracting new members, to assess the competition recognised unions were facing from their rivals, staff requirements, to help to work out strategies on how the unions could overcome their difficulties and to discuss the future plans of the BGTUC.

In addition to the above-mentioned tasks, Dalglish made extensive visits around the country to familiarise himself with the prevailing conditions. He visited trades committees in remote areas and held discussions with them stressing the importance of good organisation. Dalglish had the personal support of Woodcock, Assistant General Secretary of the BTUC, who was also visiting British Guiana at the time.

With the assistance from the BTUC, the BGTUC began to show signs of recovery by the end of 1955. The appointment of six regional officers and the sponsorship of its own 15-minute radio show had a direct impact on increased membership and, as a result, its financial status.<sup>46</sup> Dalglish’s report noted the following: “...there was general consensus of opinion that with the appointment of regional officers, the settlement of wage negotiations, inter alia, it appeared that the BGTUC was making some recovery and that it would be able to re-establish itself in a positive way....”<sup>47</sup> The BTUC, encouraged by the progress, agreed to continue its financial support to the MPCA of two hundred pounds per month for a further six months, which would terminate around December 1955.<sup>48</sup>

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45 Note of discussion between representatives of the Overseas Employers Federation, the British TUC and the Colonial Office, 19 November 1954. File 932.52. London. BTUC Library.

46 A. Dalglish Report, “Visit to British Guiana, January – March 1955”, 4 May 55. Marjorie Nicholson’s collection. File: 932.52. London. BTUC Library.

47 *Ibid.*

48 *Ibid.*

However much progress was made, there was no guarantee that 1956 would be a watershed year and that financial assistance would no longer be needed. Looking ahead the BTUC was thinking about the national elections due to take place in 1957. It was therefore crucial that the MPCA was well organised to run a successful national campaign.

In May 1957, the British TUC sent Martin Pounder to assess the strength of the MPCA and to also assist it in preparing for the upcoming elections. During his visit, Pounder confronted unending difficulties that the MPCA seemed unable to resolve. There were continuous demands, he noted, on the resources of the MPCA by its affiliates. Recurring issues such as wage disputes between the Government and the MPCA demanded much time and money, staff shortages, and lack of adequate equipment. He was able to assist in developing organisation strategies in order to strengthen the MPCA to counter the attacks from rival unions. He also assisted in establishing rules for the efficient use of finance and he stressed the importance of keeping financial records.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, Pounder, a lawyer, offered his good offices to the Sugar Producers' Association (SPA) in the preparation of its case against the British Guiana Government's demand for wage increases for sugar workers. Having seen first-hand the obstacles and the many demands on the unions, Pounder recommended to the British TUC to continue providing financial support. His recommendation was accepted. Despite the difficulties, Pounder was optimistic that the MPCA would continue to improve, especially with the introduction of the Check-off system.<sup>50</sup>

On such an optimistic note, by the end of 1957, the British TUC decided to shift its focus from the MPCA to assist the general trade union movement in British Guiana. It felt that the Movement as a whole needed strengthening and therefore the British TUC contributed both materially and financially at the rate of one hundred pounds per month. The money was to be

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<sup>49</sup> M. Pounder's Report, "Visit to British Guiana, 13-24 May 1957". Marjorie Nicholson Papers. Minutes Box. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid..

channeled through the British Guiana TUC for organisational purposes to the Trades Unions generally.<sup>51</sup>

In 1958, the BTUC assistance to BGTUC was of an unusual nature. In that year unemployment, it reported, had reached an alarming level. Out of a labour force of 160,000 some 30,000 were unemployed with a further 20,000 underemployed. The unrest in British Guiana it began to feel, did not result from interference from rival trade unions trying to manipulate the situation but from Colonial policies. Faced with the prospect of huge demands for financial assistance from its members, the British TUC cooperated with the British Guiana TUC to send a delegation to present its case to the Colonial Office in London. The visit took place between 24 March and 12 April 1958.<sup>52</sup>

By January 1960, the British TUC found itself involved in the Civil Service Unions pay claim against the British Guiana Government. In light of the nature of the dispute, the British TUC sent L. J. Sapper, the General Secretary of the Post Office Engineering Union, to assist the Federation of Unions of Government Employees (FUGE) to prepare its case for presentation. FUGE workers had staged a 15 days strike and were willing to prolong their action if a solution was not found. There was the threat that other Services employees could join the strikers. Sapper's assistance (being a lawyer) proved valuable to FUGE in the preparation of its case for presentation to the Whitley Council. With guidance coupled with legal advice, the MPCA was successful in negotiating a minimum rate agreement for its workers.

The PPP victory again in 1961 increased the fears of the Man Power Citizen Association in British Guiana. Richard Ishmael, President of the MPCA, expressed his fears for the future of the British Guiana Trades Union Movement to the British TUC delegation that was visiting British Guiana at that time. Ishmael warned the British TUC that if British Guiana were granted independence, Cheddi Jagan seemed likely to attempt to establish a communist regime similar to

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<sup>51</sup> M. Pounder's Report: "The MPCA, British Guiana," 1 January 1958. Commonwealth Affairs Committee File: 3/5. 1 Jan. 1958. London. British TUC Library.

<sup>52</sup> Commonwealth Affairs Committee, Minutes of 3 June 1959. CAC-4. London. BTUC Library.



the regime in Cuba. If such a situation should arise, he feared that the Trade Union Movement would cease to exist.

The actions taken by the newly elected Government, which included the suspension of the convertibility of the local currency even into sterling, increases in taxes, and the imposition of compulsory saving schemes, which the masses of workers could not afford, gave rise to fears and insecurity. Adding these to the PPP political orientation, there were reasons for concern.

The problems of 1961 were expressed in Mr. Ormond Dice's Report<sup>53</sup> of 2 May 1961. Ormond Dice, Secretary and Treasurer of the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) located in Trinidad, was sent to British Guiana to assess the situation. The Report described the atmosphere in British Guiana as being very tense, resulting in part from racial tensions in the country. Another notable observation was the MPCA concerns for the future of a free trade union movement in British Guiana, in the event of a PPP victory. While in British Guiana, Ormond Dice attended the BGTUC meetings, lectured at three Trades Union Seminars on the work of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and how it functioned. The British TUC subsequently communicated the situation prevailing in British Guiana to the ICTFU in Brussels.<sup>54</sup>

The victory of the PPP at the elections of 1961 increased anxiety in some quarters, bordering on fear of Cheddi Jagan's motives. The Government did not announce its plans for the future of the country. There were unsettled claims of Public Service employees with the Government and the public dissatisfaction with the Government's Budget proposals, all culminated with the outbreak of disturbances again in the country. On this occasion politicians Burnham and D'Aguiar joined in the demonstration against the Government. The Government was unable to control the situation and Governor Ralph Grey had to request reinforcements stationed in Jamaica.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> O. Dyce: Report: "The Situation in British Guiana," 2 May 1961. File 9728. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from the General Secretary, BTUC, dated 15 June 1961 to O. Bacu, General Secretary of ICFTU, Brussels. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>55</sup> Meeting of the Colonial Advisory Committee (CAC) of the TUC. 26 Feb 1962: "British Guiana Disturbances". Marjorie Nicholson's Papers. File: 972.8. London. BTUC Library.

The BGTUC joined the fray and called a general strike. Almost every sector providing essential services was affected. With union members deprived of wages and salaries, the BGTUC requested assistance from the British TUC. The General Council of the BTUC agreed to provide financial support in order to relieve the pressure on the BGTUC. The sum proposed was about eight thousand pounds which was to be used for organising programmes. The British TUC also decided to send a representative, Frank Cousins, to British Guiana as they had anticipated that the PPP Government might retaliate against the trades unions. The British TUC was at this time cooperating with the ICFTU on aid programmes for British Guiana trades unions.<sup>56</sup>

The PPP Government was accused of wanting to impose its will on the Colonial Governor. Cousins, anticipating the Government's retaliation against the British Guiana unions, forewarned the British TUC. In 1962, the political turmoil within British Guiana continued unabated. In its memorandum on Independence and Constitutional Format for British Guiana, the Trades Union Council stated, inter alia, that "there is widespread fear of a Communist take-over in an Independent British Guiana." The TUC attributed this attitude to the policy pursued by the Government of the day.<sup>57</sup> The statement continued, "It is an indisputable fact that Cheddi Jagan is one of the world's most avid admirers of the Russian way of life, and has proclaimed himself a Marxist. He is also a staunch supporter and admirer of Fidel Castro who he claims to be the greatest Liberator of the century."<sup>58</sup>

The fear was perpetuated by rhetoric and provocative actions of the PPP members. Brindley Benn, then Chairman of the People's Progressive Party and the Minister of Natural Resources, stated in the Legislature that, "it is easier to stop tomorrow than to stop Communism". The Minister also alluded 'to the rolling of heads', including those of trades unions leaders, and had also stated that the Government had the power of life and death over the people.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Meeting of CAC, 26 Feb. 1962. *Op. Cit.*

57 British TUC Memorandum on "The Question of Independence and Constitutional format for British Guiana," p. 3. File: JL 682, 1962. London. BTUC Library.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

59 *Ibid.*

The British Guiana Trades Union Council believed that British Guiana's difficulties stemmed from Cheddi Jagan's political outlook, his frequent outbursts against the Western democracies and his apparent special interest in dealing with the Eastern bloc powers, including Russia.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the uncertainties prevailing in British Guiana, the British Guiana TUC supported the demand for independence, but, it felt that the country's political system needed: a radical change in order to provide a climate that would promote stability, economic and social advancement; to avoid serious explosions emerging from racism; and to remove the grounds on which fears of communism could be generated.<sup>61</sup> Had there not been the communist threat from Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party, British Guiana would probably have achieved its independence within this year.

The dust had hardly settled on the Public Service strike in 1962, when, in March 1963, the PPP Government introduced another Labour Relations Bill. At issue here was one similar to the Bill that was introduced by the Government in 1953 – forcing the workers to choose which trade union they wished to have represent them. The BGTUC took the position that since this organisation included representation of every trade in the country, it could rightly claim to speak as the representative of organised labour and that it was the only central organisation which could make such a claim.<sup>62</sup> The British TUC took the view that under the Constitution, the Government had an obligation to first discuss the issue with the British Guiana Trades Union Council or with the employers' organisation. It thought that the Government had failed to do this. It therefore considered this action on the part of the Government unconstitutional.<sup>63</sup> Negotiations broke down between the two parties, the Government and the British Guiana TUC, and the latter called a strike on 18 April 1963 in support of the workers. By May 14, political unrest in the country reached such

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<sup>60</sup> British TUC Memorandum on "The Question of Independence...." *Op. Cit.*, p.4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>62</sup> "The 95th Annual Trade Union Congress Report," Brighton, UK, 2-6 Sept. 1963. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*.

a level that on 19 May, 1963 Governor Grey declared a State of Emergency. This was the third time since 1953 the Governors in British Guiana had to resort to Emergency Powers.

The social implications were: unemployment, disruption in the sugar industry, rioting, demonstrations, to name a few. The British TUC, in solidarity but most important, to prevent the weakening of the position of the MPCA and the undermining of the trade union movement, sent financial assistance of one thousand pounds to the British Guiana TUC Strike Relief Fund. Later in June 1963, the British TUC sent one of its legal experts, Robert Willis to assist the BGTUC in preparing its case against the Government. Willis broke the impasse and a settlement was reached early in July 1963.

Another form of combating communism was through sponsorship of training courses for Guianese in the UK. The British TUC worked closely with the British Council and the Colonial Office. It was represented on the Standing Committee on the Welfare of Colonial Students and Trainees in London. This Committee liaised with the public, informing them on Colonial students, their needs and their health, and providing opportunities for them to visit British homes.<sup>64</sup>

On 7 December 1964, general elections were held in British Guiana under the system of Proportional Representation. The PPP obtained a majority of the votes cast. On 23 December 1964, Governor Grey issued a statement indicating how he intended to exercise his discretionary powers under Article (291) of the Constitution to select a Premier. At the 1964 Constitutional Conference in London, the Colonial Secretary announced that a coalition government would be formed between the PNC and UF (Cheddi Jagan having refused to be party to any coalition government). Duncan Sandys, appointed Forbes Burnham as the next Premier of British Guiana. Within two years, British Guiana was granted its independence and became Guyana.

**c. Cooperation Between the British Trade Union Congress and the British Government in fighting Communism in British Guiana.**

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<sup>64</sup> The 86th Annual Trades Union Congress Report. Brighton. Sept 6-10, 1954; p. 233. London. BTUC Library.

We have established the anti-Communist credentials of the British TUC, its identification of the communist threat in British Guiana in the form of Cheddi Jagan and the People's Progressive Party, and its support for local non-communist-led unions in British Guiana. We will now look at the cooperation between the British Trade Union Congress and the British Government during the period under study. Although the TUC and the Labour Party have extremely close historical ties, it must be said that the BTUC cooperated with both Labour governments and Conservative governments. During the period under study, 1953-1966, there were four Conservative governments from 1953 -1966 and one Labour government from 1964-1966. .

Direct co-operation on colonial affairs and on British Guiana in particular was undertaken through TUC - Colonial office coordination. The TUC noted in 1965, that:

"...the main contact with departments of the British government is now at the official level and consists of an exchange of information on policy and sometimes of representations on behalf of or concerning Commonwealth trade union movements (mainly in territories still dependent)... The Colonial Office has always been sharply aware of trade union issues, having continuing responsibility for administration in the territories with which it deals, but the Commonwealth Relations Office have shown very little interest in or understanding of labour matters, and similarly the Treasury. Indeed the Foreign Office were somewhat more responsive so long as they had a Labour Advisor, which they do not have now... More recently the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) (which is the successor of the Department of Technical Co-Operation) has become responsible for many UK activities in overseas countries, Commonwealth and otherwise, and contact between the TUC and the ODM is increasing... The TUC is bound to play some part in the evolution of satisfactory machinery for co-operation with the government in replacement of its former connection - with the Colonial Office in the case of the Commonwealth."<sup>65</sup>

Evidence of cross-fertilisation between the TUC and government exists from well before the period under study. In 1948, Dame Anne Laughlin and Dalglish were designated by the TUC as their representatives on the Labour Advisory Committee of the Colonial Office.<sup>66</sup> The British Trade Union Congress had a permanent representative within the Colonial Office, which afforded a special place to the labour movement. Both Institutions, labour and government, advocated freedom

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<sup>65</sup> Confidential paper, "Congress Motion No.40 Remitted; Commonwealth Trade Union Secretariat," 20 December 1965, F&GPC, 3/1, paras. 17,18 and 20, Marjorie Nicholson's collection. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>66</sup> British TUC, Industrial News, No.38, 30 April, 1948. London. BTUC Library.

in their respective areas of responsibilities. They shared the same objective with the British Guiana TUC, which was, preventing a communist state from being established in British Guiana.

Regarding British Guiana, as we have seen above, the BTUC stated that it had adopted the position that the British trade union movement, in furthering its basic policy of assisting dependent peoples towards self-government, would continue to accord every possible aid to the peoples of this country, particularly through the maintenance of a free trade union movement.<sup>67</sup> The British TUC has had a long association with British Guiana trade unionism when the first trade union was established by Critchlow in 1929. In 1939, Walter Citrine noted that the West Indies were ripe for Trade Union activity.<sup>68</sup> Co-operation between the British government and the British TUC rendered the task of both institutions much easier. In fact they complemented each other's efforts.<sup>69</sup>

Following the suspension of the British Guiana Constitution on 9 October 1953, a Constitutional Commission, known as the Robertson Commission, was appointed to visit British Guiana and to carry out an investigation. The British Government invited George Woodcock, the Assistant General Secretary of the British TUC, to be a member of that Commission. The British TUC noted that this had "heightened our interest in the future of British Guiana."<sup>70</sup> The British Government realised the important role the Trade Union Movement could play in British Guiana where there were serious labour problems. The British TUC, for its part, welcomed the opportunity to work towards advancing trade unionism in British Guiana and pledged to "continue giving every assistance to the people of British Guiana and we shall take particular interest in the growth of a free and active union Movement in that country."<sup>71</sup>

On 19 November 1954, representatives from the British TUC participated in a discussion with representatives from the Colonial office and the Overseas Employers Federation. They met to

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<sup>67</sup> British TUC Report: "The Suspension of British Guiana's Constitution." Circular No. 24, Oct. 1953. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>68</sup> W. Citrine's Report, "Trade Unionism in the West Indies, 1939." Marjorie Nicholson Papers. File 932.93. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>69</sup> A. Chase, *A History of Trade Unionism in Guyana 1900-1961*. *Op. Cit.* in note 1.

<sup>70</sup> The "Waddington Commission's Report, 1954". London. BTUC Library.

<sup>71</sup> Report, "Proceedings at the 86th Annual Trade Union Congress," 6-10 September 1954, Brighton. London. BTUC Library. p. 232.

discuss the problems of trade unionism and industrial relations in British Guiana in the light of the Report of the Robertson Commission.

At its 86th Annual Conference held at Brighton in September 1954, the British TUC strongly condemned the PPP for abusing its power and wanting to undermine the powers of Governor Savage. It firmly declared that the General Council of the British TUC supported Colonial policy in British Guiana. Through cooperation between these two institutions, a 'common front' position, paved the way for support and implementation of Colonial policies wherein the British TUC co-opted support of the British Guiana trades unions..<sup>72</sup>

In May 1955, a meeting of officials from the Colonial Office officials, BTUC and the Overseas Employers Federation noted that "The Communist threat in the West Indies must not be over-painted nor yet under-estimated. While the direct regional efforts of the WFTU through their spearhead in Jamaica may not have made much progress in Jamaica itself, the attempt will no doubt continue." Furthermore, "British Guiana, incidentally, is a special case in that Communist leadership there did not gain control through direct use of the trade unions; but there was afterwards the effort to capture and distort the weak existing movement for political purposes..."<sup>73</sup> The discussion noted the tendency, in situations where weak labour organisation existed, as in British Guiana, for local politicians to seek temporary advantages for themselves by dabbling in the labour field. Communism "intensifies the risk of political misdirection of trade unionism." Consequently, the task of building good labour relations "has become an essential part of the constructive answer to the Communist threat..."<sup>74</sup> Consequently, "all interested parties in London (the OEF, the TUC and the Colonial Office), although each having a different approach and different obligations and responsibilities, not only share certain broad objectives but are in many ways, working to the same

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<sup>72</sup> *Op. Cit.*, p. 213 (fn. 440) "86<sup>th</sup> Annual BTUC Congress, 1954." BTUC Library.

<sup>73</sup> BTUC, "Industrial Relations in the British West Indies," Summary of discussions between representatives of the Trades Union Congress, the Overseas Employers Federation and the Colonial Office," 4 May, 1955, C.A.C. 4/2 (1954-1955). File: 9728. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>74</sup> "86<sup>th</sup> Annual BTUC Congress." BTUC Library.

end.<sup>75</sup> A summary of the above meeting, one of six which had occurred to date from 1954-1955, noted the above-mentioned task was un-changed and “is made more urgent and important.”<sup>76</sup>

During the crisis over the Labour Bill in 1963, exchanges by telephone, summarised by BTUC officials, offer further evidence of close cooperation between the BTUC and the Colonial Office (CO). An unspecified TUC official’s notes (probably Marjorie Nicholson) on 4 April 1963 of a conversation with Mr. Stacpoole, a deputy of Mr. Piper from the Colonial Office, revealed that information being sent from British Guiana noted that the “the strike is solid, including sugar estate field workers. ...The Colonial Office think that the strike is getting more solid as it goes on.” In face of the unwanted Labour Bill “The British Government’s only bargaining points are on the demand for independence, the possibility of revocation of the constitution and the fact that the UK has put in twelve thousand pounds £12,000 over three years for the development plans.”<sup>77</sup> The question was put to Stacpole as to whether trade unions were facing their last ditch, to which he replied that “he found Jagan by himself to be sensible,” but people in his entourage, Brindley Benn and Kelshaw, “carry far too much weight.”<sup>78</sup> A similar note of 6 May detailing a conversation with Gibbs of the Colonial Office, by which time the Labour Bill had become law in British Guiana; reveals the Colonial Office’s lawyers’ advice that nothing could be done about this latter fact since the British Guiana constitution was not infringed. The Colonial Office received a protest from the Public Services International (inter-American section) and it replied: “they are unable to intervene.” On the other hand, an appeal urging all affiliates and friends of the PSI to send funding to the BGTUC, made through the journal of the PSI, did not pass unheeded by the BTUC.<sup>79</sup> On 8 May 1963, notes on conversations with the Colonial Office revealed that the latter “would not be surprised if a State

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<sup>75</sup> *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 73.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> BTUC, “British Guiana: Note on telephone Conversation with Stacpoole,” 30 April, 1963, Marjorie Nicholson Files, 972.8. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> “British Guiana, Gibbs Telephoned 6/5/63,” signed MN/SK, 6 May 1963, Marjorie Nicholson papers, File: 972.8. London. BTUC Library



of emergency were declared very shortly, but they do not wish this said outside this office and in particular do not wish it to be conveyed in any way to British Guiana.”<sup>80</sup> Furthermore,

As to whether we send a donation, in the light of Walter’s letter and his insistence that any money given should go to the Central Strike Fund, it appears that it might be regarded as a deliberate slight on the BGTUC if relief was sent through the churches. In view of Walter’s involvement in the negotiations at the highest level and the determination shown by the BGTUC, it seems impossible for US to refuse to give any assistance at all...<sup>81</sup>

After the declaration of a state of emergency, a note of 9 May 1963 by Messrs J. A. Hargreaves and Woodcock of the BTUC, indicated that:

Apparently the BGTUC are increasingly concerned about financing the strike and it is suggested that they would need funds amounting to (pounds) 30,000 per week if all the strikers were to get some relief. Mr. Hood [then in British Guiana] again asks that we should consider giving some assistance. The PSI are considering doing so soon, and the ICFTU - which has already sent \$1000 - is also considering an ISF contribution, to be authorised by the Emergency Procedure. Both bodies would specify that their contribution was for the relief of distress, and the ICFTU is considering the use of the Caribbean Congress of Labour as a channel of contribution in order to emphasise the serious view of the situation taken by West Indian trade unionists.<sup>82</sup>

In the context of the on-going state of emergency, and the imminent arrival of troops, the “determination of Cheddi Jagan, despite the fact that he had agreed not to put the bill to the Senate,” despite Governor Grey’s insistence that he withdraw the bill, led to the following conclusion on the part of the BTUC and the Colonial Office:

“It is clear that British Guiana could not be pushed into independence with this Government as it was, and it appeared that if there could be no agreement in British Guiana the British Government might ultimately have to impose a constitution.”<sup>83</sup>

There can be little doubt, in light of the evidence presented above, of the fact of cooperation between the BTUC and the Government of the United Kingdom. Cheddi Jagan himself, was therefore not wrong to suggest in the midst of the crisis that such collusion existed.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “British Guiana, Note on conversations with the Colonial Office,” signed MN/SK, 8 May 1963. File 972.8. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid..

<sup>82</sup> J.A. Hargreaves and G. Woodcock, “British Guiana,” 9 May, 1963, File 972.8, Marjorie Nicholson Papers. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>83</sup> “British Guiana, Note on conversation with the Colonial Office,” 10 May 1963, signed by MN/SK. File 972.8/3. Marjorie Nicholson Papers. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>84</sup> See Jagan’s accusation at the UN and the CO rebuttal in CO 1014/073, File: A346/15. 12 May 1963. London. PRO:

We turn next to the role of American trade unions, particularly the AFL-CIO.

#### 4. The AFL-CIO

##### a. Identification of The Communist Threat

Serafino Romualdi was for twenty years representative of the American Federation of Labour and later of the AFL-CIO. In 1946 he was assigned as Latin American representative charged with the task of organising an inter-American federation of 'free labor unions.' The need for such a group was expressed after a group of allegedly 'Communist' trade unions, headed by Lombardo Toledano of Mexico and backed by the Soviet Union's propaganda resources, had already undertaken such a mission and had formed alliances with Fascist trade unions organised under Peron in Argentina and Vargas in Brazil.

In 1967 Romualdi acknowledged his role in identifying a communist threat in British Guiana in 1951 and in organising to block it. Romualdi wrote:

'Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who was three times Prime Minister of British Guiana before his country won its independence in May 1966, has on repeated occasions accused me of having committed acts hostile to his regime and of having conspired to overthrow it. The latter charge was included in a letter to *The New York Times*, July 1963. Cheddi Jagan's letter claimed that 'local (Guianese) trade unionists known to be hostile to the Government - and none others - have been trained by the American Institute for Free Labor Development to overthrow my government. Serafino Romualdi, head of the Institute, has declared his opposition to my government.'

'I never tried to deny Cheddi Jagan's charges. As a matter of fact I publicly acknowledged the fact that, having become convinced of Dr. Jagan's subservience to the Communist movement since my first visit to British Guiana in 1951, I did everything in my power to strengthen the democratic trade union forces opposed to him and to expose Jagan's pro-Communist activities from the day he was elected Prime Minister, following the general elections of April 27, 1953.'<sup>85</sup>

In Romualdi's view, the Jagans and some of their collaborators were confirmed, 100-percent communists, who never deviated one iota from the Stalinist line, either in their writings or in their utterances.<sup>86</sup>

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85 S. Romualdi. *Presidents and Peons. Recollections of a Labor Ambassador*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1967. pp. 345-346.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 346.

The May 1952 issue of the Inter-American Labour Bulletin carried a story under the caption "ORIT Affiliate Battles Communism in British Guiana". The story charged that Cheddi Jagan's PPP was seeking to destroy the MPCA, which it described as the leading labour organisation in British Guiana. It described the PPP as communist and stated that it was fomenting wild-cat strikes and attempting to set up a rival organisation in the sugar estates. It rallied in support of the MPCA as an organisation conducting a strong campaign against communism in British Guiana. Around this time an official US presence in British Guiana was initiated in 1953 with the establishment of the United States Information Service (USIS) in Georgetown, the Capital city, on 5 April 1953.

In the November 1953 issue of the same Bulletin, the MPCA General Secretary, Shakoor charged that following its election to office on 27 April, 1953, the PPP had launched an offensive to destroy the free trades unions in the country. The article complained of rival unions being set up in the sugar and other industries which immediately, it claimed, became affiliated to the WFTU.

#### **b. Support for Local Trades Unions**

The AFL-CIO sought to combat communism in British Guiana and in the period 1962-64 in particular, it practically led the MPCA and other unions in British Guiana in the fight against the perceived PPP communist adversary.<sup>87</sup> This is brought out very well in correspondence between the AFL-CIO and Sir Jock Campbell of Bookers Brothers McConnell. In a letter dated 28 January, 1954, the latter complained in sharp terms about an article in International Trade Union News of December 1953 referring to Booker's Sugar Estates Ltd. Demerara, and suggesting that the problem of British Guiana had been "the exploitation of its resources by the outsider and the denial to the native of even the right to make a living." In a conciliatory letter dated 31 March 1954, Jay Lovestone of the AFL-CIO expressly stated that his organisation was combating the communist threat in British Guiana. He argued that,

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<sup>87</sup> See, in particular, George Meany Memorial Archives, International Affairs Department, RG 18, Jay Lovestone Papers, Box 10/24, British Guiana, 1954. See also, Country Files, Box 16/15, British Guiana, 1962; Box 17/1 British Guiana, 1963; Box 17/2, British Guiana, 1963; Box 17/3, British Guiana, 1964. The George Meany Memorial Archives has files for 1954 and 1962-1964 that contain rich information on this topic.

“...It should not be difficult to disagree without being disagreeable. Rest assured that our first duty is to prevent the Communists from grabbing British Guiana. As I see it, this is the first pre-requisite before we can even attempt any sound progressive basic social reforms and development of full national freedom for the people of British Guiana.”<sup>88</sup>

It is also brought out in correspondence between Richard Ishmael, President of the MPCA and the British Guiana TUC as well as other anti-communist trades union leaders in British Guiana and the AFL-CIO, in the period 1962-64, a period of repeated trade union action in opposition to the PPP Government. They shed much light on the history of British Guiana during this period and on the methods of operation of the AFL-CIO in steering and assisting local anti-communist unions such as the following.

**i. Financing local Trades Unions and their Leaders**

The AFL-CIO provided general financial support to the MPCA and the BTUC as well as financial assistance to support strikers against the PPP administration. It effectively had Richard Ishmael, the leader on its payroll. The correspondence between Ishmael and the AFL-CIO explicitly shows the insistence of the AFL-CIO that Ishmael be engaged full time in trade union activities in return for the salary he was being paid. A letter dated 14 December, 1962, from Ishmael to Andrew McLellan, Associate Inter-American Representative, opens as follows<sup>89</sup>:

Dear Andy:

I received your cheque for \$350.00 on the 6th December... Either there has been an oversight in the change on the amount from \$350.00 to \$450.00 or either you misunderstand an ambiguity in a certain paragraph of my letter dated 24th October...

The letter goes on to cite a letter dated 16 October from McLellan in which he had written to Ishmael:

"I have had considerable difficulty in showing the other interested brothers the necessity of making an adjustment but they have finally agreed with me to meet your request for these additional benefits, consequently your monthly cheques from now on will be for \$450.00 and if before the termination of your year's activities, we can raise the necessary amount, I will make up the differential for the months of August and September. The feeling here, however, and I am writing in all frankness, is that the

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<sup>88</sup> International Affairs Department. Country Files, Box 10/24. Series: British Guiana, 1954. Jay Lovestone Papers. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>89</sup> International Affairs Department. Country Files, 1945-1971. Series: British Guiana, 1962, Box 16/15. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

adjustment should be made starting this month. I sincerely regret, Richard, that I am not in a position to do much negotiation on this matter as I have exhausted all of the possibilities that I know of. If, for some reason, you are unable to accept the adjusted amount as is specified in the enclosed cheque, please do not hesitate to let me know so that I can notify the other interested brothers of your decision not to remain full time with the movement."<sup>90</sup>

Ishmael went on to plead for the prompt payment of his monthly cheque and for all future correspondence to be sent to his personal address, Post Office Box number 146 in Georgetown, British Guiana.<sup>91</sup> Earlier in the year, in a later letter dated 21 September, 1962, McLellan had written Ishmael in the following terms:

"Dear Richard:

...

A few days ago, in talking to a friend of mine from the State Department who evidently had just returned from British Guiana, he made the remark that you were still attending to your obligations in the high school [of which Mr Ishmael had been the proprietor] and that you still maintained your office there. I informed this friend that I was quite confident that he was mistaken as I was almost positive that you had been devoting yourself full time to the labour movement since August 1st and undoubtedly he had been mistaken. At the time of this conversation I did not want to make an issue of this matter. I would consider it a great personal favour, Richard, if you would write to me and clarify this point as I would like to be in a position to call this person and tell him that he was mistaken in this statement; that you are working full time and that you had retired from the high school activities, both teaching and administrative, for the year's leave-of-absence which you secured and which started August 1st."<sup>92</sup>

The employer was speaking to the employee. An example of the relationship at work is provided in a letter dated 31 July, 1964 from McLellan, then Inter-American Representative, to Mr Ishmael:

"Dear Richard,

I have just been informed that a representative from the WFTU office in Prague is in route to British Guiana. I can only assume that he has been invited by Jagan and that he is up to no good. Perhaps you and Gene [Meakins] should get your heads together and begin drafting a campaign alerting the workers of this man's presence. His name is Mahandra Sen and is of East Indian origin and, of course, will bear close vigilance."<sup>93</sup>

## **ii. Trades Union Leaders from British Guiana selected for Prestigious Scholarships or similar Visits to the USA.**

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<sup>90</sup> International Affairs Department. Country Files, 1945-1971. Series: British Guiana, 1962, Box 16/15. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

It is a well-known fact that part of the AFL-CIO strategy for supporting local trade unions in British Guiana was to provide training in the USA. This was done strategically. A case in point was that of B.J.H. Nichols, Chairman of the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union. He had been at the heart of the trade union actions against the PPP Administration. On 13 May, 1964, in the midst of the anti-PPP campaign, Gerard P. O'Keefe, Director, Department of International and Foreign Affairs, wrote to Frederick A. Colwell, Chief, Special Exchanges Branch in the Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs:

"I have had considerable contact with Mr Bert J. H. Nichols, President of the Commercial and Clerical Workers Union of British Guiana, and he has impressed me as a trade union leader who would benefit greatly from participating in a course similar to that offered at Harvard University.... I sincerely request that favourable consideration be given to the application of Mr Bert Nichols for participation in the Harvard Trade Union Program for the fall 1964 course."<sup>94</sup>

The approach succeeded and Nichol eventually left for the USA to be trained.

Another example of the method at work may be seen in a letter dated 6 April, 1962 from Romualdi, Inter-American Representative to Andrew L. Jackson, President of the Federation of Unions of Government Employees. Dealing with the issue of proportional representation for Guyana, which the AFL-CIO was working for, Romualdi wrote:

"Please give to our friends the enclosed material. I understand that Israel does not yet have a Constitution; the only reference to a system of proportional representation is contained on page 28.

"I expect to meet with Doherty pretty soon and we will then agree about the future visit of our friends to the United States."

Romualdi wrote in the same letter:

"I now plead with you to send me without delay the name of your candidate for the school, American Institute for Free Labour Development, and all the other information required."<sup>95</sup>

Political strategy and trade unionism thus went hand in hand.

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<sup>94</sup> International Affairs Department, Country Files, 1945-1971. Series: Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963-1964. File 017/03. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>95</sup> International Affairs Department; Country Files: 1945-1971. Series: British Guiana. File: 1962. George Maryland. Meany Memorial Archives

### iii. The AFL-CIO Representative in British Guiana

AFL-CIO representatives in British Guiana, were behind-the-scenes leaders of the anti-communist trades unions. On 9 October 1964, for example, Gene Meakins, the representative in British Guiana wrote to McLellan:

"On the political side, Ishmael indicates from time to time that he is still thinking of going into politics. The deadline for any declaration is Oct. 26. I have convinced him of the position he would place himself in by any such move since his strength is derived from the MPCA and the MPCA can continue to exist only so long as it remains unidentified politically. Nobody can take on Jagan politically on the sugar estates, and that is why the MPCA has to carry the fight for survival strictly on a trade union basis. It has worked so far. At the moment, with the negotiations going on and the UN trip forthcoming, I don't think Ishmael will have any time to be thinking politically before it is too late to make such a move. Actually he is convinced that politics would be a wrong move for him in this election, but you can never tell what he might do on the spur of the moment and then informing me later."<sup>96</sup>

Using information provided by its representative, the AFL-CIO compiled briefing papers on British Guiana for circulation in the anti-communist crusade. A briefing paper, "British Guiana: A Land in Turmoil, (1963) by Ben. Segal, Director of the Education and International Affairs Department, carried the following assessment:

"Small as it is, approximately the size of Minnesota, British Guiana today is a firebrand, already half-ignited. It is a firebrand that has the potential to set aflame not only Latin America but even the entire globe. But the Communists show no inclination to withdraw the torch which may give them a second outpost in the Western Hemisphere and a strategic entry into the South American continent."<sup>97</sup>

### iv. AFL-CIO Agitation and the United Nations Decolonisation Committee

On 21 July, 1961, Jose M. Aguirre, Chief, Regional Affairs, wrote as follows to Richard Ishmael:

"I have started today to work in the direction we agreed to last Saturday... Today I had lunch with the representative of Venezuela, Dr Leonardo Diaz Gonzalez, to whom I have suggested that the Committee should invite you to come to New York as a 'petitioner'... I am endeavouring that you should be invited by the Committee instead of your requesting to be heard by them..."

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96 . International Affairs Department. Box: 0701, 1945-1971. Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963-1964. File: 017/03. British Guiana, 1964. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

97 International Affairs Department. Box: 07/01, 1945-1971. Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963-1964. File 1961. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

Gonzalez thinks that it will be possible for him to take the necessary initiative...<sup>98</sup>

It bears mentioning that at the time, Venezuela was pressing a re-activated border claim against British Guiana.

A follow-up letter dated 23 September, 1964 to Richard Ishmael from Aguirre, stated: "...in addition to the official hearing, you will have informal meetings with Mr. Diaz Gonzalez and with some other members of the full Committee. We will also try to arrange for you to speak on Television and perhaps to organize for you a press conference."<sup>99</sup>

**v. AFL-CIO Dissemination of Information on Perceived Pro-communist activities in British Guiana.**

The files at the George Meany Memorial Archives contain, for example, a list compiled by its representatives in British Guiana of persons (about 200) who had allegedly been sent by the PPP government on scholarships to communist countries. On 24 October, 1962, McLellan, Associate Inter-American Representative, wrote to Richard Ishmael:

"I would be particularly interested in hearing from you, with reference to the general reaction in British Guiana to President Kennedy's speech of the 22nd vis-a-vis the Soviet armament build-up in Cuba and the establishment today of a naval blockade. It would appear to me that in the face of this firm and energetic action on the part of President Kennedy, Premier Jagan will soon be making an 'agonising reappraisal' of his particular situation. If you have any comments on this, Dick, please write and let me have them."<sup>100</sup>

On 24 March, 1964, McLellan, Inter-American Representative of the AFL-CIO wrote to the latter's representative in British Guiana, Gene Meakin:

"We are continuing to give the British Guiana situation as much publicity as possible and the more recent program was a fifteen minute radio interview I did last Friday with Tad Szulc of the New York Times. This interview was transmitted over the Mutual Broadcasting System on Sunday afternoon.

"You will also note that the Inter-American Labor Bulletin as well as the AFL-CIO News have been carrying stories.

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98 International Affairs Department. Box: 07/01, 1945-71. Caribbean Area, British Guiana, 1963-1964. File: 017/03: British Guiana, 1964. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

99 Ibid.

100 George Meany Memorial Archives. Box: 017/01, 1945-71. Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963. File: British Guiana, 1962.



"The background material you have sent me will serve me in good stead when I do the British Guiana article for the AFL-CIO Trade Union News which is published, as you may know, in five languages and is distributed throughout the free world."<sup>101</sup>

**vi. AFL-CIO Raised Funds in the United States of America for the Anti-communist Fight in British Guiana.**

A letter dated 15 November 1964<sup>102</sup> contains an intriguing reference to information being shared with those who had provided financing in support of anti-communist strike action in British Guiana. McLellan, in that letter, referred to anonymous funders who were kept informed of developments on behalf of free trade unions in British Guiana.

**vii. Publicising The Communist Threat in British Guiana**

An undated reference paper in the AFL-CIO files for 1962, which had apparently been prepared for distribution as a background paper concluded:

"Dr Jagan cannot be regarded as a neutralist, or a leftwing socialist. If independence is granted now, British Guiana will become the first constitutionally elected Soviet-controlled dictatorship on the South American continent. Dr. Jagan and his colleagues are Communists. They are dedicated to the belief that history will ensure the victory of 'socialism' and the world's inevitable progress towards that true Communism which so far has not been achieved."<sup>103</sup>

**viii. British Knowledge of the Role of the American Unions**

British trades unions and government sources were well aware of the involvement of the American unions in British Guiana.

Walter Hood, sent by the British TUC to British Guiana in the summer of 1962, wrote to Marjorie Nicholson, of the International Department of the British TUC, "I did hear something that I want to get on the record, but in our usual confidence, that the AFL [American Federation of

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101 International Affairs Department. Box: 017, 1945-71. Caribbean Area: Box: 017, File: 017/03 - British Guiana folders: 1962 & 1964. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>102</sup> McLellan's letter of 15 November, 1964. Ibid.

103 The John F. Kennedy Library has papers, which Romualdi sent to Arthur Schlesinger itemising the pro-communist line of Cheddi Jagan. In the George Meany Memorial Archives some of these papers are in Box: 017/01, 1945-71. File: Caribbean, British Guiana 1963. Boston.

Labour] are going to subsidise without anyone knowing... R.I. [Richard Ishmael], but I have to watch events before I will know if this is so.”<sup>104</sup> On 22 October 1962, he wrote to Nicholson: “I am now certain that he is being subsidised by the Americans in order that he can spend more time on trade union work. So he is being paid to be President [of the MPCA] and then again.”<sup>105</sup> A UK Ministry of Labour report in October 1963<sup>106</sup> noted the channels being used by the Americans. The US Agency for International Aid (AID), it said, provided assistance “to strengthen free labor unions by leadership training and worker education in union administration, collective bargaining, grievance procedures, job evaluation and labor-management relations.” The report noted that “it is evident that AID has recently stepped up, either directly or indirectly,” in Latin America and the Caribbean. The regional effort was centred on support for the American Institute for Free Labour Development (AIFLD) in Washington, D.C. that commenced operations in 1962. Initial grants totaling \$350,000 were made to AIFLD for workers’ education operations at the regional training centre in Washington (to provide training for 100 Latin American and Caribbean area trade unionists annually) and at national centres in Ecuador and Venezuela and one of \$135,000 was provided for a labour education institute in Peru. A direct grant of £65,000 pounds was given to the University of the West Indies, Jamaica for the establishment of a trade union education institute; \$827,000 was provided in 1962/63 for operations in Washington and in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominica, Ecuador, Trinidad, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The Ministry of Labour report continued that the US Information Service ran large numbers of seminars and distributed great quantities of literature, some with a special labour slant. The US State Department had a programme for educational and cultural exchange activities that sponsored visits abroad by American trades union leaders to lecture, talk to and meet trades unionists, and also visits to the USA. In 1963, an officer of the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Mechanical

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104 W. Hood, letter to M. Nicholson, 22 August, 1962. Marjorie Nicholson Papers. File 973. BTUC Library.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Overseas Department, Ministry of Labour, “Aid to Trade Unions,” September 1963, H.Q.W. 513-259/63 CB. Confidential paper prepared for TUC, OEF and HMG meeting of 29 October, 1963. Marjorie Nicholson papers, File: 973. London. BTUC Library.

Workers visited Latin America ... and the Caribbean area, British Guiana being one of the countries. Furthermore, US Unions were reportedly channeling assistance to Latin American organisations through ITSs, but the Communication Workers of America were collecting \$2 per member monthly “to finance trade union organisers in various South American countries”. Known as “Operation South America”, this programme financed the activities of individual organisers in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Dominica as well as in British Guiana and those of Cuban unionists in exile.<sup>107</sup>

#### **ix. Cheddi Jagan Complains about the Role of the American Trade Unions**

Philip Agee, in Inside the Company – the CIA, wrote of the CIA’s involvement in the violence of 1963 in British Guiana. He stated that the CIA backed strikes, public disturbances, and rioting that devastated the country, particularly Georgetown. According to Agee, it was the violence that gave the British Government the basis to call in its army to restore law and order in the colony.<sup>108</sup> Besides covert operations, the US overtly hailed the British decision as a victory in preventing the establishment of a communist beach-head on the mainland of South America. They also aided the British Government through their diplomatic channels to ensure that the latter’s decision was well received in the Caribbean.

Reporter, Neil Sheenan writing in the New York Times, on 21 February 1967<sup>109</sup> reported on how the CIA-financed American labour unions, the American Federation of States, County and Municipal Employees Union (AFSCME), channeled money through the London-based Public Service International (PSI). According to his story, the CIA also financed the American Institute of Free Labour Development (AIFLD), which provided ORIT with resources to train local citizens in the operation of free economies at their centres in Latin America, the Caribbean and the USA. The main aim of the AIFLD, he reported, was to create a docile subservient trade union movement.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Op. Cit., in note 104 above, para 12.

<sup>108</sup> P. Agee, “Inside The Company – the CIA,” Brochure, 1970.

<sup>109</sup> N. Sheenan, “CIA is linked to strikes that helped oust Jagan,” New York Times, 21 February 1967.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid..

Evidence of American government cooperation with labour at the highest levels, according to Meisler, is found in the words of John Kennedy to the AFL-CIO convention in the fall of 1963:

“I want to express my appreciation for the actions which this organization has taken under the leadership of Mr. Meany, both at home and abroad, to strengthen the United States, to make it possible in this hemisphere for labor organisations to be organized so that wealth can be more fairly distributed.”<sup>111</sup>

Kennedy's successor, President Johnson, in a letter to Assistant Secretary of State Thomas C. Mann, noted “ I want you to work closely with private United States groups and institutions carrying out activities in Latin America.” Among the several groups he listed, “[t]he AFL-CIO topped the list.”<sup>112</sup> It is generally understood that the term Latin America encompassed non-Spanish speaking areas of the South American continent.

In British Guiana, the Premier's Office issued in August, 1963 a “Note on the Trades Union Movement in British Guiana showing how it is under the Dominance of the United States Trade Union Movement, whose aim is the Overthrow of the Government of British Guiana.” In this note, the Premier (Cheddi Jagan) complained that the previous twenty months had seen a massive effort to bring the trades union movement in British Guiana under the control of the United States trade union movement. It stated:

“Most of the more important unions in British Guiana are affiliated to US unions and their internationally controlled affiliates; large sums of money are being sent into the country; Guianese trades unionists are being trained in increasing numbers in the United States and US trades unionists visit the country one after the other in quick succession. And the aim of all of this is the overthrow of the Government which was elected to office in British Guiana in August, 1961.”

The Note provided details on the affiliation of British Guiana trades unions to the ICFTU and the connection between British Guianese and US trades unions. It gave details of visits of US trades unionists to British Guiana since the PPP was re-elected to Government in August, 1961. It listed the names of Guianese who had been trained in the USA “to harass the government”. It also detailed financial assistance from the US Institute for Free Labour Development to British Guiana

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<sup>111</sup> S. Meisler, “Dubious role of AFL-CIO Meddling in Latin American,” 10 Feb. 1964. Labour Bulletin 1972. London. PRO.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

labour unions. Furthermore, it charged that the trades union movement in British Guiana was more deeply concerned with the political than industrial questions. It cited in support of the last charge the following pronouncement of the British-mandated Wynn Parry Commission in 1962:

“there is very little doubt that despite the loud protestations of the trades union leaders to the contrary, political affinities and aspirations played a large part in shaping their policy and formulating their programme of offering resistance to the budget and making a determined effort to change the Government in office.<sup>113</sup>”

In June 1963, Cheddi Jagan wrote a letter to The New York Times, giving his view of the events.

“Considerable evidence exists that the strike is not industrial but rather politically inspired by the opposition and by business elements opposed to the government’s program of social and economic reform. ...Local trade unionists known to be hostile to the government – and none others – have been trained by the American Institute for Free Labor Development to overthrow my government. Serafino Romualdi, head of the Institute, has described his opposition to my government. The Trade Union Council campaign of passive resistance organized by US-trained unionists is openly supported by the opposition parties and has led to racial violence.”

In July, Cheddi Jagan amplified these charges, telling the Associated Press,

“that the American Institute for Free Labor Development had given the Trade Union Council \$2 million for a housing scheme and that other sources had contributed \$1.2 million to the trades unions for British Guiana during the strike.”

Romualdi, in a statement, replied that when he had last visited British Guiana in April 1962,

“...it appeared to me that young democratic trade union leaders would need intensive training to combat Cheddi Jagan’s efforts. Subsequently, eight Guianese came to Washington in June, 1962, as participants in the Institute’s first course. In September of that year, six of these men returned to British Guiana, supported by AIFLD internships, enabling them to put into practice, on a full-time basis, what they had learned at our school... When the BGTUC decided to call a general strike in an attempt to prevent passage of Cheddi Jagan’s labor bill, I was asked to put the Institute’s six interns, who were working with various local unions, at the disposal of the council’s strike committee... In agreement with the Institute’s Secretary-Treasurer, Joseph A. Beirne, I instructed the interns to fully devote their efforts to supporting the strike, and extended their internships, which were scheduled to end on June 15, to August 15... I would like to say that I am proud of our graduates in British Guiana. In spite of sacrifices and hardships they kept their places in the front lines of a difficult and, unfortunately, sometimes bloody battle.”

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<sup>113</sup> “Report of the Wynn Parry Commission, 1962”. File: 62/01. London. BTUC Library.

The American Institute for Free Labor Development however, refuting some of Jagan's claims, stated that, while it had discussed possible housing aid, it never gave the BGTUC \$2 million for a housing project or contributed \$1.2 million to the strike coffers. Other US labour sources, while agreeing that the Institute did not make the contribution, said that the \$1.2 million figure probably did not exaggerate the amount of American labour money that went to British Guiana during the strike.<sup>114</sup>

In February 1964, Stanley Meisler, a Washington correspondent, reported in the paper The Nation, #108, on the strong connection between American labour and the American Government, citing British Guiana for proof. He stated:

“British Guiana is a good place to begin. American Government, business and labor have never been happy with the leftwing administration of Cheddi Jagan that took office after the August, 1961, elections in the British Colony. American woes and worries have multiplied with the approach of independence. The AFL-CIO boasts of its part in helping the trade unions there battle the Jagan government. “In British Guiana”, said a recent union advertisement, “the AFL-CIO has rendered generous aid to the free trade unions resisting the attempt of the pro-Communist Jagan regime to destroy their independence.” On the surface, American labor has moved into British Guiana to help brother unions fight communism. But the situation in British Guiana is far more complicated than that and its “generous aid” has involved the AFL-CIO in racial and political strife. In addition, not all the aid given by the AFL-CIO has come from the labor treasury. In British Guiana, as elsewhere in Latin America, the AFL-CIO has operated with money supplied by the United States Government and big business. It is no secret: the AFL-CIO glows about its partnership with government and business in fighting communism in this hemisphere. Anyone expressing concern about the notion of an American labor movement becoming tangled in the purse strings of government and industry is pooh-poohed as a silly left-winger.”

When Jagan's party tried to push through legislation that, in the view of his opponents, would give him control over the unions, the British Guiana Trades Union Council called a general strike. This strike, supported by the AFL-CIO, lasted eleven violent, murderous weeks and turned into a succession of race riots between Negroes and Indians. The end seemed a union victory: Jagan withdrew his legislation, and the British decided to delay independence.

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<sup>114</sup> “Report of the Wynn Parry Commission, 1962.” Op. Cit..

An American journalist, Meisler reported that, the AFL-CIO and the international organisations under its influence had sent representatives into the colony to train the Guianese in American-style unionism, and had selected more than a dozen anti-Jagan union leaders for more intensive schooling in the United States. Much of this education programme had been managed by the American Institute for Free Labor Development, an enterprise run by the AFL-CIO, partly with its own funds but principally with money made available by the Alliance for Progress and private enterprise. The Institute had become an important arm of AFL-CIO operations in Latin America.

**x. Working behind the Scenes for the Introduction of Proportional Representation in British Guiana.**

We saw in earlier chapter that Secretary of State Dulles had put forward the idea of proportional representation as a way to stop Cheddi Jagan from winning elections in British Guiana. The case for proportional representation would, subsequently be taken up by Burnham with the support of Romualdi and his associates,

The strategy of Burnham and his union supporters was to demand that British delay independence until there was a new election based on Proportional Representation, which would give Burnham almost the same number of seats in the legislature as Jagan and, possibly, the premiership or a partnership with Jagan.

On 24 October, 1962, for example, P. McLellan, the Associate Inter-American Representative, wrote Richard Ishmael:

"As I wrote you in my last letter, the question of proportional representation has been discussed here in Washington with the proper authorities and I am sure this is one of the matters Brother Howard McCabe will discuss with you when he arrives in Georgetown soon."<sup>115</sup>

**c. Cooperation with the American Government in fighting Communism in British Guiana**

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<sup>115</sup> International Affairs Dept. Country Files: 1945-1971. British Guiana, 1962. Box 16/15. Maryland. George Meany Archives.

The Eisenhower Administration's anti-communist drive extended to the labour front. One of the objectives of NSC 144/1 was to encourage the development of the regional Inter-American Organisation of Workers, an anti-communist trades union movement in Latin America sponsored by the American Federation of Labour. The Administration's policies included gathering information on Latin American trades unions, inviting labour leaders to visit the United States among other things. In implementing these policies the State Department consulted with US union officials, prominently George Meany, the President of the AFL, who assured State Department officials that his union's goal in Latin America was 'to create friendship and support for the US in opposition to the attempt of the Communists to seek the same support and friendship of Russia.' The Eisenhower State Department officials were impressed by the anticommunist fervour of US trades unions, and Assistant Secretary of State John Moors Cabot recommended to Secretary Dulles that "we be prepared to supplement the financial contributions of US labour on a highly secret basis."<sup>116</sup>

There can be no doubt that AFL-CIO representatives in British Guiana were working closely with the US Consul in British Guiana and with government officials in Washington. After contacts with the American Consul, on 9 April, 1962, McLellan wrote to his colleague Meakins in Georgetown:

"I was happy to receive the news with reference to the immigration authorities' inability to deport you as a prohibited immigrant. I have never been too worried as in my conversation with the former Consul General Melby he has stated that to his knowledge of the British Guiana laws there were still many types of delaying tactics to let through injunctions, restraining orders, and show-cause orders, so at no time was I too worried about the situation. Unfortunately we did take Ishmael's cable message to President Meany quite seriously and on April 2nd I fired off a rather long message to Jagan. At least he will know that we are being kept posted on all the latest developments in British Guiana."<sup>117</sup>

The correspondence between AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington and its representatives in Georgetown or with anti-communist trades union leaders in British Guiana mentions on

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<sup>116</sup> S. Rabe, "Dulles, Latin America and Cold War Anti-Communism," in R. Immerman, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. p. 164. See generally George Morris, *CIA and American Labor: The Subversion of the AFL-CIO's Foreign Policy*. New York: International Publishers, 1967.

<sup>117</sup> George Meany Archives. Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963-64. British Guiana file:1964 . Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.



occasions that information or representations had been submitted to the appropriate government channels in Washington. On 16 July 1962, McLellan wrote to Richard Ishmael:

"Just a short note to thank you for your kindness and consideration in sending me the copy of the transcript of Dr Jagan's testimony before the Commonwealth Inquiry Commission. This transcript is of considerable interest to a great number of people here in Washington who have been most gracious in their thanks to me for the copies I made available."<sup>118</sup>

On 11 March 1964, McLellan wrote to his colleague Meakins in Georgetown

"On Monday morning, Secretary-of-State Dean Rusk's Labour Adviser George P. Delaney called a meeting in his office to discuss the situation in British Guiana as it was being reported to the Department of State. Present were Mr. Melby, former Counsel (sic) General in British Guiana; Joseph Mintzes, Labour Adviser (Europe) for the Department of State; Arnold Zempel, Assistant to Mr Delaney; Howard Mc Cabe, International Affairs Director of the PSI, Wally Legge, Inter-American Representative of the PTTI and myself. We discussed the entire situation and all of us participated in the actual discussion. We endeavoured to bring each other up to date on the daily news clippings we are individually receiving from BG."<sup>119</sup>

The AFL-CIO Inter-American representative Romualdi, maintained unrelenting opposition to Cheddi Jagan throughout the period covered in this study. The records of the Kennedy White House show him compiling and submitting memoranda such as "Facts on Cheddi Jagan and His Communist controlled Peoples' Progressive Party of British Guiana". In a supplementary note dated 17 September 1962, which he submitted to President Kennedy's aide, Arthur Schlesinger, he quotes extensively from the following official excerpts of the Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry following the strikes. The memorandum noted the questioning of Jagan by Luckhoo as follows:

(page 1820)

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "Now, could you tell me why you broke with him (Jagan), Mr. Burnham?"

A. Mr. Burnham: Yes Sir. Because I found he was more interested in peddling the latest Moscow line than in looking after the particular and peculiar problems of Guiana

(Page 1876, Cont'd)

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: Cheddi Jagan, I do ask you – just answer me – you know the tenets of Communism?"

Cheddi Jagan: Your definition of Communism may be different from mine."

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<sup>118</sup> International Affairs Dept. Country Files: 1945-71. British Guiana, 1962. Box 16/15. George Meany Archives.

<sup>119</sup> Box : 017/01, 1945-71. File: Caribbean Area, British Guiana 1963: McLellan's letter of 11 March 1964, to Meakins. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

CHAIRMAN: That will not do. You have admitted to knowing the tenets of Communism. You are now asked, having regard to those tenets, do you believe in them? You must answer yes or no.

(Page 1877)

A. Dr Jagan: "I believe the tenets of Communism to be 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.'

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "That is your conception of Communism and you believe in that?"

A. Cheddi Jagan: "Yes."

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "That represents your Communist belief?"

A. Cheddi Jagan: "Yes."

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "Cheddi Jagan, are you an admirer of Fidel Castro?"

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "Had you declared him to be the greatest liberator of the twentieth century?"

A. Cheddi Jagan: "Yes."

(page 1878)

Q. Mr. Luckhoo: "Are you an admirer of Nikita Khrushchev?"

A. Dr Jagan: "I have said so, yes."

(Page 1879)

Q. Luckhoo: "You are not aware of those policies. (of Khrushchev) Well, the policies which you know --- is there any that you can think of to which you do not subscribe?"

A. Dr Jagan: "I cannot think of any at the moment."

(Page 2053)

Chairman: I think you may take it Mr. Luckhoo, that you have established that he (Cheddi Jagan) is an avowed Communist and has not changed his views subsequent to Black Friday."

## 5. Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that American trades unionists feared a Communist threat in British Guiana as early as 1951 and began to keep a watchful eye on political developments in the country. After the British suspension of the constitution of British Guiana on 9 October 1953, both British and American trades unions would play an active role in supporting anti-Communist unions in British Guiana. They did so by sending experts from the UK and the USA to advise local unions, providing legal expertise, providing financial support, sponsoring training courses abroad, and, particularly in the case of American trades unionists, taking a leading role in providing warnings of a communist danger in the colony.

In the case of the AFL-CIO, we have seen evidence that the leading trade unionist in British Guiana was put in their pay and that American trades unionists took a leading part during strikes against the PPP government. The materials researched in the George Meany memorial Archives in

Washington, which houses, the AFL-CIO papers, provides evidence that the AFL-CIO was engaged in a partnership with the US State Department and the CIA in combating the alleged communist threat.

In the remaining chapters of this thesis we look at British-American cooperation between 1954 and 1966 before looking at the fate of the country after independence. We turn next to Anglo-American Cooperation between 1954 and 1960.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **ANGLO-AMERICAN COOPERATION ON BRITISH GUIANA, 1954 – 1960**

## **1. Introduction**

In the preceding chapters, we examined British and American perceptions of an alleged Communist threat in British Guiana in 1953. We then proceeded to look how British and American trade unions perceived and reacted to the alleged Communist threat. We also reviewed earlier how the British and American Governments concerted their efforts in dealing with the situation in British Guiana. As regards the role of British and American trade unions, we saw that they both acted to counter an alleged Communist threat in the colony. There is no direct evidence of actual cooperation between British and American trade unions, but their efforts took place within the broader framework of anti-Communist activities of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

In this chapter, we return to Anglo-American cooperation on the colony in the period 1954 to 1960. We first look at British and American threat assessments in British Guiana in the period, political developments, and then examine areas of actual cooperation between the UK and the US on British Guiana.

## **2. UK and US Threat Assessment of British Guiana**

We begin with an examination of the British and American threat assessments:

### **a. The UK Threat Assessment**

For reasons such as the above, the British Government, at the start of 1954, was still concerned about the communist threat posed by the PPP in the country. Acts of sabotage had been carried out on some essential services in the country: the telephone services in a populated district in the countryside; the water supply in the capital; disfigurement of an important symbol of the British Royalty.<sup>1</sup> The Colonial Secretary, Lennox-Boyd, advised the House of Commons on 2 November 1954 that the British Government accepted the Waddington Commission's conclusions and that the British Government still had no confidence in the PPP. The Commission had

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<sup>1</sup> UK Security Report from Jamaica to The War Office, UK. 3 July 1954. #2107. CO/1031/1430; File: A/260/05, 13 May 1964. London. PRO.

recommended: "... that there is at present no alternative to a period of marking time in constitutional matters..."<sup>2</sup>

The British Government's concerns about the communist threat posed by the PPP persisted in 1954 and was reinforced by the PPP boycott of the Robertson Commission. The British Government remained concerned about the communist threat posed by the PPP in the country.

Rutter of the US Embassy in London reported that the British Government had been disillusioned by the disarray of the Opposition forces to the PPP. The Colonial Office representative, with whom he spoke had emphasised: "that the British Government was not opposed to Nationalism or self-government for Guiana. It was determined, however, that the colony's political development should take place upon the lines of a democratic constitution and not those of a Communist state."<sup>3</sup>

The UK Government's concern about the communist threat posed by the PPP increased when British security forces in the colony reported on several events that took place in British Guiana:

- i) On 6 May 1954, the Security Report stated that homemade bombs which had been placed under the Blairmont Police Station had caused much damage to the building. However, according to the report there were no casualties and no arrests had been made.<sup>4</sup>
- ii) There had also been two attempts at arson on the Bank and Post Office on the Corentyne Coast. Both attempts were unsuccessful.<sup>5</sup> Further sabotage incidents had occurred in late May 1954. This time, the Reports stated that the water pumping station in Georgetown had been damaged by explosion.
- iii) The Statue of Queen Victoria, situated near the Law Courts in Georgetown had been hit by an explosion causing damage to the building.

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<sup>2</sup> US Embassy, London, Peter Rutter's Report, "British Guiana," 18 November 1954. DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> UK Security Report from Jamaica, week ending 11 May 1954, to The War Office, UK, 13 May 1953. # 2084. CO/1031/1430; File: A/260/05; 13 May 1954. London. PRO. p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

iv) In the countryside, telephone lines had been cut. The Police Commission had reported that these acts of violence were increasing and that they were the work of young hooligans.<sup>6</sup>

How did the Americans view the situation? We turn next to this.

### **b. The US Threat Assessment**

During the period 1954-1957, the American assessment was that the communist threat had not abated. This concern was revealed in a memorandum the US Department of State issued in June 1954 to its Consulate General in Port-of-Spain wherein the US Department had compiled lists of members of the top organs of Communist Parties in non-orbit countries throughout the world including British Guiana.<sup>7</sup>

Despite US fears of a communist threat in British Guiana, Consul Maddox had offered a ray of hope with the return of peace. In a report he sent to the State Department, he had expressed some optimism about British Guiana. He wrote:

“...An atmosphere of uncertainty and tension, coupled with fear of violence by PPP extremists, which prevailed last February ... has now given way to surface calm, concealing a deeper concern...”<sup>8</sup>

But, the Report cautioned:

“...delving deeper, however, it is clear that the basic factors remain unchanged, ...”<sup>9</sup>

Maddox was referring to the deplorable social conditions that still prevailed in October 1954 and which Cheddi Jagan had used for political capital in order to advance his own political agenda

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<sup>6</sup> UK Security Report from Jamaica to The War Office, 3 July 1954. #2107. CO/1031/1430; A/260/05, 13 May 1964. London, PRO.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy's Dispatch #A-105 of June 1, 1954, "Members of Communist Party Organs in Non-Orbit Countries." DOS Decimal Files, 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Maddox's Report, 21 Oct. 1954, dispatch 1109: "British Guiana Reviewed one year after the "Crisis." DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

in the colony.<sup>10</sup> Maddox was probably thinking that if the economic situation did not improve there could be a renewal of violence in the colony.

It should be borne in mind that in 1955, the US Administration's concern about the communist threat in the Western Hemisphere in general had heightened as a result of Soviet actions in Europe and Asia. The Soviet Government had recognised the German Democratic Republic, which subsequently became a member of the Warsaw Organisation Treaty with the seven East European client states.<sup>11</sup> In this same year, the Soviet Union's attention had also been focused on the Middle East. It began supplying arms to Egypt through Czechoslovakia and it supplanted the British and the US in financial aid to Egypt for the completion of the Aswan Dam after the two western powers had withdrawn their support.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, in 1956 during the Suez crisis, the Soviet Union had supported the Egyptian Government, which had been in conflict with the British for control of the Suez Canal. Given Soviet readiness to exploit the situation, US reaction to Soviet interference in the Latin American hemisphere must be viewed in this context.

By 1957, the US Administration had shown growing concerns about the communist threat in British Guiana. Acting Secretary of State Dulles had taken some measures to determine the extent to which there had been communist infiltration in British Guiana. Dulles' memorandum to the American Consulate in Georgetown requested it to provide "...names of affiliates of international Communist front organisations, such as the World Federation of Democratic Youth."<sup>13</sup> Consul Cope's reply: "There are no (repeat no) affiliated international Communist front organisations in British Guiana."<sup>14</sup> This must have surprised Dulles.

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<sup>10</sup> Maddox reported on the deplorable conditions which existed in the colony, viz; unemployment among the young, the underdevelopment of technical and administrative skills; roads remaining in their pristine ruggedness, and an increasing population. Maddox's Report, 21 Oct. 1954, dispatch 1109. Op. Cit., p.1.

<sup>11</sup> The seven states were East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania and Hungary. F.S. Northedge & M.J. Grieve, *A Hundred Years of International Relations*. New York, Praeger. 1982. pp. 262-263.

<sup>12</sup> The Soviet Union stepped in after Britain and the US had withdrawn their financial support from Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> Dulles' telegram of Oct. 9, 1957 to AMCONSUL, Georgetown. DOS Decimal Files: 1955-1957. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>14</sup> American Consul Cope's memo of 25 Oct. 1957 to Secretary of State. DOS Decimal Files: 1955-1957. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.



Nevertheless, there had been other events to whip up the communist frenzy in the US. In 1957, South Carolina's Congressman, Johnston, had warned about a communist threat in British Guiana posed by the PPP. He charged the US Government with being neglectful of this development in the Western Hemisphere, while it had focused its attention on far away places such as Asia, Africa and Europe, spending billions of dollars to fight communism.<sup>15</sup> The Congressman drew the attention of the President to an editorial in the News and Courier of Charleston, South Carolina, which had complained that while the US Government had been outspoken of the communist menace in various parts of the world, it had ignored what was happening in British Guiana. Johnston told the Congress that a communist, Cheddi Jagan (re-elected in 1957), had come to power in British Guiana. He praised the British for their action in ousting Cheddi Jagan and the Government from power in 1953 and considered that in moving against Cheddi Jagan the British had been "serving American interests."<sup>16</sup> Another Congressman, Walt Withrow from Wisconsin, also warned of a communist threat in the PPP. In his address to the Congress, he stated: "For the second time the Communists have control of the Government of British Guiana. It is no fluke. It is the second time for the same candidates." Asking why this had taken place, he proceeded to offer his own answer:

"Because the British foreign policy seems only slightly different and slightly softer than ours. The British have lost the Empire piece by piece - just so do we seem to lose the fight on communism. The British had trouble making up their minds on the political state of affairs in the colonies, and so this wavering policy brought destruction."<sup>17</sup>

Consul Maddox, the American Consul in Port-of-Spain, who covered British Guiana gave the following explanation of what was happening: "...the British Government did not view the communist threat in the same light as the Americans did." Maddox had formed this view after his discussion with the British Minister of State for the Colonies Mr. Henry Hopkins and the Assistant Under-Secretary of State in the Colonial Office, Mr. Philip Rogers, who had visited British Guiana

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<sup>15</sup> Congressman Johnston's speech in the US Congress, "Communism in Latin America." US Congressional Record – Senate. Vol. 103, Part II. August 9 - 21' 1957. US Government Printing Office. Washington, D.C. 1957. pp. 15338-15339.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

in late September/early October 1954.<sup>18</sup> According to Maddox, the British Government had been fully aware of a dozen or so of PPP leaders considered to be communists. The US Administration had felt that these persons should have somehow been removed from the scene. Maddox mentioned several possibilities the British could have taken to get rid of them.<sup>19</sup> 'Banishment', among others, he stated, would have been the best solution to solve the problem. This method had been widely favoured in British Government circles, except "among the top officials more immediately responsible to the Colonial Office."<sup>20</sup>

Unable to influence the PPP leadership, the US Administration in early 1958, began to take a hard look at the future prospects of British Guiana. How could change come about was a question that the State Department pondered. One idea considered was changing the electoral system from 'first past the post' to 'proportional representation'. Dulles had written a memorandum on this subject and on the consequences of the 'First-past-the Post' system.<sup>21</sup> Dulles' memorandum had shown that, given the racial division of the population, the outcome of an election could be predicted. Implicit in this was the conclusion that a system of proportional representation could deny a majority to the PPP.

Meanwhile, political developments were taking place in the country which we summarise below.

### **3. Political Developments in the Country**

There were five principal political developments in the country during the period covered in this chapter: the re-imposition of direct British rule from 1953 to 1957; the introduction of the 1957 Constitution; the re-election of the PPP in 1957; the introduction of the 1961 Constitution; and

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<sup>18</sup> Maddox's Report, 21 Oct. 1954, dispatch 1109, 21 Oct. 54: "British Guiana Reviewed one year after the "Crisis". DOS Decimal Files 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> "Exile," Hopkinson admitted, had been used as a weapon in British colonial rule, but he said that was an extremely difficult step to take. What Hopkinson actually told the Press was that he did not believe in banning political parties or Communists, but added, "except in extreme cases," and "so long as they behave themselves."

<sup>21</sup> Dulles' Memorandum, "Administrative Division of British Guiana," 25 April 1958 to AMCONSULATE, Georgetown. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1667: 1955-1959. Maryland. US National Archives.

discussions about whether British Guiana should join the West Indies Federation. We look at each of these in turn.

**a. Direct British Rule, 1953-1957**

Following the suspension of the Constitution on 9 October 1953, the Colony reverted to direct British rule until August 1957. During this period, the British Government tried to find ways of improving the social conditions in the colony. It encouraged and facilitated some American companies to invest in the colony. In 1955 the McBride Oil and Gas Corporation carried out oil explorations on the coastal regions. It granted permission to the US Air Force to carry out feasibility studies with a view of establishing an airbase in the interior of British Guiana. Between 1953 and 1957 the British Government granted permission to Union Carbide to prospect for manganese in the North Western District of British Guiana.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1957, the British Government worked with the Department of State to try and arrange a loan from the IBRD to assist Cheddi Jagan (again the Premier following his re-election in 1957) with his budget of G\$14 million for road, irrigation, and land reclamation projects which, in his opinion, had been neglected by the Colonial Office. The rich agricultural coastlands of the colony are below sea level and therefore are prone to constant flooding. Colonial officials had participated in these discussions in Washington. From Britain's perspective, whatever assistance the Government could get from outside sources would help to ease the financial pressure on the British Government.

**b. The Constitution of 1957**

The Robertson Commission of Enquiry, which had been appointed to look into the causes of the suspension of the Constitution in October 1953, had issued its report in 1954 and Colonial Secretary, Lennox-Boyd, had announced to the House of Commons on 2 November 1954 that the British Government accepted the Commission's conclusions. The Commission had recommended:

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<sup>22</sup> AMCONSUL Cope's Report to DOS, July 28, 1958. Control # 19575. US Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

“...that there is at present no alternative to a period of marking time in constitutional matters..... They do not recommend a specific time, nor does Her Majesty’s Government wish to be tied to one. Her Majesty’s Government, however, consider it desirable to set some maximum term to the personal appointment of the present Members of the Legislative Council without prejudice to when it may be possible to hold elections again. The present appointments will, therefore, run for four years from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1954.<sup>23</sup> During the period of this interim Government, it is our firm intention to do everything possible to fit the Colony for a return to representative government. In particular there will be a thorough reform and extension of local government institutions.”<sup>24</sup>

Rutter of the American Embassy in London<sup>25</sup> had reported to the State Department that, from the discussions he had with Colonial Office staff on British Guiana, the British officials “...are just as much baffled as to how to break the Constitutional impasse in Guiana as are the members of the Robertson Commission.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Press Reports,<sup>27</sup> some political parties in British Guiana were rejecting the attempts by Governor Savage and the Colonial Office to re-introduce a measure of self-government in the territory. On 25 April 1956, the Colonial Secretary had made some proposals for the re-introduction of democratic institutions in British Guiana. Those proposals had been strongly resisted by some opposition groups in British Guiana, which had claimed that the British Government had not offered anything different from what had been in the 1953 Constitution. Faced with such opposition, the British Government nevertheless went ahead with a changed constitution<sup>28</sup> in order to satisfy the people of British Guiana and to prevent a “stand-off”.

In 1957 a new constitution came into force that provided for elections for a government with reduced powers in comparison with those under the 1953 Constitution. This Constitution had been

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<sup>23</sup> US Embassy, London, Peter Rutter’s Report, “British Guiana,” 18 November 1954. DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box 3543. Maryland. US National Archives

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>25</sup> First Secretary of US Embassy, London.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 23.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times* of London and a *Reuters* dispatch in First Secretary Rutter’s Report: ‘British Guiana Constitutional Proposals’, Oct. 18, 1956. Dispatch #2640. April 27, 1956. US Embassy, London, to DOS. US Decimal Files 1955-1959. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>28</sup> The 1957 Constitution provided for a Legislative Council of not more than 28 members (compared to that of 1953, there was an increase of 4) no less than 14 elected members, 3 *ex-officio* members, and not more than 11 nominated members. In the Executive Council, there were the usual 3 *ex officio* members, 2 nominated and 5 elected members of the LegCo, (compared to 4 *ex. Officio*), 1 nominated and 5 elected members. See Rutter’s Report, London to DOS. “British Guiana Constitutional Proposals.” US Decimal Files: 1955-1959. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

similar to that of 1953 consisting of a bi-cameral Legislature. The Legislative Council consisted of the Speaker, 3 ex-officio members, 14 elected members and 6 nominated members while the Executive Council consisted of 3 ex-officio members from the Legislative Council and 5 elected members of the majority party in the Legislative Council.<sup>29</sup>

The country moved ahead to new elections under this new constitution.

### c. The PPP Re-elected in 1957

New elections were held in August 1957 and the PPP were again returned to power. Cheddi Jagan would later deem this period "In Office but Not in Power."<sup>30</sup> He claimed that the Constitution had placed many restrictions on his Government which had prevented him from planning an effective programme of change for the colony, resulting in an inability to govern on a day-to-day basis. The restrictions had impacted politically on Cheddi Jagan's choice of a French economic adviser, who was socialist-oriented, Professor Charles Bettelheim. Governor Savage had rejected the latter.<sup>31</sup> Similar rejections had taken place on the economic front, when Cheddi Jagan had shown his preference for purchases of a glass factory and a rice-bran oil factory from the German Democratic Republic and from Hungary respectively, plus a negotiated loan that he had arranged in Cuba.<sup>32</sup> Cheddi Jagan blamed the British Government for the difficulties facing the colony. According to an ILO survey in 1956, 18% of the labour force was unemployed, while crime and juvenile delinquency were on the rise.<sup>33</sup>

Cheddi Jagan complained that he wanted to initiate changes and pass legislation to improve conditions in the country, but that he had met obstructions all the way. In his Book, The West on Trial, he discusses at length his efforts and the obstructions that he had encountered from the Colonial Office.

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<sup>29</sup> *Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Conference*. Colonial Office, 1957. Cmnd 998. London. HMSO..

<sup>30</sup> C. Jagan, *The West on Trial. The Fight for Guyana's Freedom*. rev. ed. 1975. Berlin: Seven Seas Publishers; p. 188.

<sup>31</sup> C. Jagan, *The West on Trial. The Fight for Guyana's Freedom*. Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>33</sup> An ILO Survey, 1956, cited in *Guyana, Fraudulent Revolution*. Latin American Bureau, 1984. See also C. Jagan. *The West on Trial. Op. Cit.*, p. 184.

While all of this was going on, a new Party, the People's National Congress (PNC), had been formed with Forbes Burnham as its leader. The PNC and Forbes Burnham henceforth came to play a critical role in the political life of the colony as events led to a new Constitution in 1961.

#### d. The Constitution of 1961

In June of 1958, the new, partly elected Legislature, had passed a resolution calling on the Secretary of State for the Colonies to convene a meeting to begin discussions on proposals for a new constitution. The PPP Government had proposed two areas for immediate consideration:

i) constitutional reform with a view to the granting to British Guiana the status of a fully self-governing territory within the Commonwealth; and

ii) conclusion of an agreement between the British Guiana Government and the British Government for a transitional period whereby the latter would exercise control over defence and give guidance in foreign relations other than trade and commerce.<sup>34</sup>

Following the discussions which took place in London in September 1958 between the British Guiana Ministers and the Secretary of State, Governor Partick Renison subsequently appointed a Constitutional Committee to undertake the task at hand. The Committee held its discussions in November 1958 and presented its Report to Governor Renison.

At a Constitutional Conference held subsequently in London, the British Guiana leaders did not have a common position. Some wanted independence by August 1961 within the Commonwealth, while others held the view that independence should be granted by stages and not in one step.<sup>35</sup>

The Secretary of State for the Colony, Lennox-Boyd, while accepting the principle of independence for British Guiana, stressed the need: "for orderly and progressive transfer of responsibility and power to British Guiana Ministers."<sup>36</sup> The Conference did not accede to the request to grant independence to British Guiana in 1961. Instead, a new constitution was

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<sup>34</sup> *Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Conference*. London. March 1960. Cmnd. 998. London. HMSO, pp. 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-6. There was one in the B.G. delegation who wanted immediate action. p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

introduced and conditions were laid down linking British Guiana's independence to the attainment of independence by the West Indies Federation to which we turn next.<sup>37</sup>

**e. The West Indies Federation**

The British, American, and PPP perspectives on British Guiana's participation in the West Indies Federation differed, as we shall see below.

**i. The UK View on British Guiana's Participation**

The original concept of a West Indies Federation had originated in 1946 with Colonel Stanley, then Secretary of State for the Colonies.<sup>38</sup> The idea had been put forward as the basic aim of British policy of "quicken[ing] the progress of all Colonial peoples towards the ultimate goal of self-government".<sup>39</sup> The advantage of a federation, as Colonel Stanley had put it, was to counteract the serious difficulties which would face small 'units' having to maintain full and complete independence.<sup>40</sup>

In 1946, the UK, though recognising the many differences among the West Indian colonies and within the colonies individually, nevertheless had still desired that there be closer association among them. The concept of a Federation crystallised at the Montego Bay Conference, 11-19 September 1947. In that year, the British Guiana Legislative Council had passed a resolution declaring its readiness to enter into discussions with the other Caribbean colonies.

In March 1953, a Colonial Office briefing paper declared that one of the tasks of a forthcoming conference on the idea of the West Indies Federation was to "...encourage closer political and other association<sup>41</sup> among the Caribbean Colonies..."<sup>42</sup> As regards the participation of British Guiana in a future federation, Governor Renison, in 1955, spoke of "...the 'rightful position'

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<sup>37</sup> *Report of the British Guiana Constitution Conference. Op. Cit.*, in fn 32. p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum of P. Rogers (then Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel Stanley), 12 Feb. 1946 in R. Hyman, *British Documents on the End Of Empire: The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951*. Series A Volume 2. Part III "Strategy, Politics and Constitutional Change." London: HMSO. 1992. p. 123.

<sup>39</sup> CO 318/466/2, no. 9. 12 Feb 1946. *Ibid.*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>41</sup> There had been talks about establishing a Customs Union in the region in the 1950s.

<sup>42</sup> "West Indian Federation Conference: General Brief by CO for Ministers," *British Documents on the End Of Empire: The Conservative Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951*. Series A. Volume 3. Part III: Economic and Social Policies. London. HMSO, 1992. p. 357. *Ibid.*.

of British Guiana in the American, as well as the Caribbean community, and the British Commonwealth...<sup>43</sup>

The American Government shared a similar view.

## ii) The US View on British Guiana's Participation

The US Administration supported the idea that an independent Guiana must join the West Indian Federation. By 1958, the US Administration had laid down a number of criteria<sup>44</sup> for an independent West Indies Federation. As the British territories were advancing toward independence, the US had to make sure that the British Government understood its hemispheric security concerns. The US Administration stressed that the Association of States become more-or-less self-sufficient while remaining open to Western sensitivities. The State Department favoured the British dependent territories joining the Federation and this extended to British Guiana. In light of the uncertainty of the political future of the colony under the PPP Government, the US Administration had told Britain in no uncertain terms that it should ensure that an independent Guiana would join the Federation.

The Western Hemisphere was of vital significance to the United States. In the Cold War era, security had become even more important. The US needed the West Indies region to support its efforts in fighting communism. In US perspectives the resources of the region, including Latin America, had become vital to its survival.<sup>45</sup> By 1959, regional support became crucial to the USA when the first USSR satellite was launched in space.

In this environment, the US State Department maintained its policy that the British Government should ensure that British Guiana joined the Federation upon achieving independence.<sup>46</sup> The US Administration had told the British Government also of the importance of an independent British Guiana joining the OAS, the Caribbean Commission and its successor, the

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<sup>43</sup> AmConsul Cope's Report to DOS: "Maiden Speech of British Guiana's New Governor." Nov. 7, 1955. Dispatch # 135. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box: 1667. File: 1955-1959. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 434.

<sup>44</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960 (FRUS)*. "Central America and the Caribbean." Vol. V. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 434.

<sup>45</sup> *FRUS 1958-1960. American Republics: Central America and the Caribbean*. "NSC Report." NSC 6002/1. Washington, March 21, 1960. Vol. V. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 434.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.



Caribbean Organisation and other hemispheric Organisations. These Organisations were the region's decision-makers and therefore the US wanted to ensure that it had the support of their members for any action it might take to repel communist aggression in the region. The United States wanted to seal British Guiana within the hemispheric organisations.

Militarily, the US had base rights<sup>47</sup> throughout the region and it pressed the British Government to ensure that its colonies remained open to US military needs in the post-independent era. The US had arrangements with Britain that allowed it the use of those bases for the conduct of specified military activities.<sup>48</sup> With regard to British Guiana, the US had long-standing base rights at Atkinson Field but, by 1958, they were not exercised. Nevertheless, the US Administration wanted to make sure that Britain secured for it the continued use of the base in a future independent British Guiana.

Economically, the US had a long relationship with the countries in the West Indies and it had desired that this relationship continue after the colonial territories obtained their independence. Therefore, it had impressed upon Britain to ensure that all British colonies join the Federation. One of the objectives of the US was to have continued access to the resources of the independent territories. It had stressed that the territories had to eliminate barriers to trade and investment, particularly "...those which discriminate against the United States."<sup>49</sup> The US Administration wanted the Federated states to continue to serve as outlets for US surplus capital and this meant that the countries had to maintain open liberal markets and democratic institutions. The ultimate objective of the US Administration had been to develop an economically strong Federation in order to act as a bulwark against extremist movements, such as communists and ultra-nationalists.<sup>50</sup>

What did the PPP think of all of this? We shall see next.

### iii) The PPP view on British Guiana's Participation

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<sup>47</sup> *FRUS 1958-1960. American Republics: Central America and the Caribbean.* "NSC Report." NSC 6002/1. Washington, March 21, 1960. Vol. V. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 434.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

In 1953, one of the aims of the British Government had been to encourage the PPP Government to agree that an independent British Guiana would join the West Indies Federation. Cheddi Jagan had stated that he was in favour of British Guiana joining the West Indies Federation but he wanted to do this on his own terms, namely, that British Guiana had to be self-governing and that the Federation had to have Dominion status.

In 1955, the year that the split between Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham occurred, the US Administration had noted that the PPP's position was being influence by outsiders. According to a report sent by Maddox to the State Department, in 1955, there had been visits to British Guiana by an Indian Commissioner, Mr. Nanda, and a Mr. Bhadase S. Maraj, a Trinidadian politician who, it was thought, might have tried to influence Cheddi Jagan against joining the Federation. These visitors reportedly stressed the need to uphold the Indian culture, thereby implying that by joining the Federation, East Indians in British Guiana would be putting their religious culture at risk.<sup>51</sup>

In June 1958, Opposition Leader Forbes Burnham had brought up in the Legislative Council the question whether British Guiana should join the Federation. Forbes Burnham was pro-Federation and had mobilised support to counter Cheddi Jagan's stance against Federation. On the other hand, Cheddi Jagan's PPP had taken the official stand that a plebiscite should be held, that the unit territories of the federation should be granted internal self-government and that the West Indies Federation should have dominion status.<sup>52</sup>

By 1959, Cheddi Jagan appeared to have shifted his original position on the idea of British Guiana joining the Federation. During his visit<sup>53</sup> to Washington in August 1959 with US Department Officials for discussions on aid, when he was asked about his position on the Federation, he said that the Federation would have to be self-governing before a plebiscite would be

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<sup>51</sup> Maddox's Report to DOS, "External Influences on East Indian Politics in British Guiana," 15 April 1955. DOS decimal files. Box 3205. 1955-1959. Maryland. US National Archives

<sup>52</sup> See memorandum of Conversation at the Department of State, Aug. 18, 1959. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1667. 1955-1959. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>53</sup> This visit to Washington had been undertaken by Cheddi Jagan on his own initiatives. "Political and Economic Situation in British Guiana." Memorandum of Conversation. Aug. 18, 1959. Op.Cit., in fn, 52.

held to determine if British Guiana would join. Cheddi Jagan reportedly felt that British Guiana would not join, if the federation remained “as weak as it is...”<sup>54</sup>

The PPP Government had been very conscious of the dangers of Federation for its electoral base. It feared immigration from the less wealthy and the over-populated West Indian colonies. In British Guiana, the Indian population was then still in the majority and had begun to voice their concerns about immigration to the colony. Cheddi Jagan had also been reticent about a federation out of fear that in a Federal Government there might be limited representation. A similar fear existed in Trinidad.<sup>55</sup>

In this section we have seen how the British promoted a West Indies Federation as a way of granting independence to the small West Indian colonies; how the Americans saw the Federation as a way of containing the dangers of communism in British Guiana, and how Cheddi Jagan wanted to avoid being constrained by membership in a Federation. While all of this was going on, how were the British and the Americans cooperating to deal with economic and social conditions on the ground in British Guiana? We turn to this in the next section.

#### 4. UK-US Cooperation on British Guiana

One should place UK-US cooperation on British Guiana against the background of their cooperation on colonial policy in general.

##### a. UK-US Cooperation on Colonial Policy in General

American Presidents since President Wilson had been anti-imperialists. Wilson had stated that with an “Open Door” policy, the world economy, including the industrial powers, would benefit from the expansion of global trade deriving from development in the colonial lands.<sup>56</sup> In 1953, the US Government had continued to uphold the general policy of independence for the colonial territories. This did apply, however, to British Guiana. In 1953, the US Administration

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<sup>54</sup> Memorandum of Conversation at the Department of State. Aug. 18, 1959. *Loc. Cit.* in note 54 above.

<sup>55</sup> “Draft introduction by C. Y. Carstairs to the Report of the Standing Closer Association Committee on the arguments in favour of federation.” CO/318/847/2, no. 1, 21 June 1949, in S.R. Ashton and D. Killingray (Eds). *British Documents on the End of Empire*. Series B. Vol. 6. London, HMSO 1999. p.17.

<sup>56</sup> P.W. RODMAN, *More Precious than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World*. New York. C. Scribner & Sons, 1994. p. 19.

had concluded that the PPP Government of British Guiana was dominated by communists.<sup>57</sup> The US Administration officials had assessed that poor economic conditions in the colony were a leading factor of communist attraction to such places.<sup>58</sup>

The US Administration had decided to take some measure to combat communism in the colonies. In 1955 US Secretary of State Dulles had raised the issue of colonial development with Hoover, Acting Chief of the FBI. In his memo to Hoover, he stated:

“...I have over recent months, and indeed years, taken the occasion to press the British to take a certain leadership in developing the policy of independence for the colonial peoples which would enable us to take the initiative away from the Soviets and the Communists in this matter. President Eisenhower has also been pressing the British very hard...”

Dulles had made some effort to get the British Government interested in US initiatives. He wrote to Mr. Harold Macmillan<sup>59</sup> who had been very much interested in this issue and later that year the two men had discussed the subject in Geneva. Dulles recorded it this way: “...we talked together about a “Bandung Conference in reverse” where the colonial, and perhaps some of the ex-colonial powers would get together ... to lay out an independence programme.”<sup>60</sup> Dulles then subsequently spoke with Dean Rusk, who was then President of the Rockefeller Foundation, to assist in organising a Round Table for discussions. The objective was to energise and to assist the British Government in developing a sound de-colonisation policy.

The American analysis was that economic development of the colonies was crucial to decreasing the attractiveness of communism to their nationals. However, Britain was economically weak and was unable to provide much economic assistance. Britain looked to the USA to assist, as we shall see below in the case of British Guiana, where British-American cooperation extended to political as well as economic matters.

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<sup>57</sup> Discussions at the 165th Meeting of the NSC, Wednesday, Oct. 7, 1953. Eisenhower Papers, 1953-1961. Ann Whitman File. Abilene, Kansas. Eisenhower Library.

<sup>58</sup> Skora's Report, "Certain Comments on the Growth of Communism in the Colony of British Guiana," July 8, 1948. DOS Decimal Files, 1945-49. RG 59. Box 6048. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>59</sup> The Right Honorable H. MacMillan was then a Member of Parliament. See p. 10 above for other positions he held.

<sup>60</sup> Dulles, "Memorandum for Hoover," (Eyes Only) Nov. 23, 1955. J.F. Dulles Papers: 1951-1959. Subject Series. Box #. 23. Abilene. Kansas. Eisenhower Library.

## **b. Political Cooperation**

In early 1954 at a Dinner Conference<sup>61</sup> in London, UK and US Representatives met to discuss “The situation and problems in the Caribbean.”<sup>62</sup> The discussion touched on the prevailing conditions in the sugar industry, in which the British had a monopoly. British Guiana was a topic of conversation. Mr. Jock Campbell of Booker Brothers explained to the meeting that the action taken by the British Government in suspending the 1953 constitution had been, “...to forestall a communist threat.”<sup>63</sup> The view was expressed that “the absence of any national nucleus in British Guiana was a weakness in the organisation of the territory and provided an opportunity for communist infiltration.”<sup>64</sup> Campbell told the gathering that the measures, which the British Government had taken in suspending the constitution, had been embarrassing to it and that both British political parties had reluctantly supported the Government.<sup>65</sup> In trying to justify British action, both Campbell and US Representative Keely had emphasised that such problems were not unique to British Guiana but that they existed throughout the Caribbean.<sup>66</sup>

At the conclusion of the meeting, both sides called for the continuation of informal discussions between the two Governments on situations and problems in the Caribbean of mutual interest.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, on the ground in British Guiana efforts would be pursued for economic cooperation.

## **c. Economic Cooperation**

In the case of British Guiana, the US had been interested in prospecting for minerals and it had received the cooperation of the British Government. The British had provided maps and charts of British Guiana’s mineral areas. In October 1954, Her Majesty’s Government, by ‘Order in

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<sup>61</sup> A Dinner Conference was held at the Travelers’ Club in London upon the initiative of Messrs. Campbell and Keeley. Jock Campbell was London representative of Booker Brothers, McConnell & Co. which held a monopoly of the sugar industry in British Guiana. Keeley was the UK Minister of Food. With the two were Lawrence, UK Agricultural Minister, Callanan (APS) and Wellman (MID) – Members of US Delegation.

<sup>62</sup> Memo of Conversation between the Representatives of the British and US Governments and members of the Sugar Industry, May 11, 1954. DOS Decimal Files: 1950-1954. RG 59. Box: 3543. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Council', had extended the boundaries of the continental shelf ... in order to facilitate US operations."<sup>68</sup> In March 1955, a US oil company, McBride Oil and Gas Corporation, was granted a mining licence by the British Government to begin prospecting for oil along the Atlantic coastal areas in close proximity to the Venezuelan oil fields.<sup>69</sup> In 1959 the US and the UK cooperated on another project involving the construction of an airbase in British Guiana.<sup>70</sup>

American concerns sought to generate some economic assistance to the colony. The International Cooperation Administration (ICA) was a case in point.

#### **i. International Cooperation Administration (ICA)<sup>71</sup>**

By 1953, the economic conditions in British Guiana, as well as in other colonial territories, had been in dire need of development but the British Government could not afford to assist due to its weakened economic state. At the same time, the US Administration's interest in the development of British Guiana had been aroused out of concern that if the British were unable to improve the economic conditions for the people, such a situation would support the PPP claims of British neglect thereby giving legitimacy to its desire to seek loans from Soviet-bloc countries. In 1953, the US Administration, through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), sent an exploratory mission to British Guiana to examine the economic conditions existing in the colony and to make recommendations on its immediate needs. A year later, on 12 July 1954, a formal Agreement was concluded between the US and the UK for a 5-year period. Under this agreement, the ICA assisted on a wide range of projects such as housing, sanitation, education, health, agricultural and community development throughout the colony.<sup>72</sup> Governor Renison, expressed deep appreciation for American assistance in British Guiana.

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<sup>68</sup> Maddox Report, "British Guiana Boundary Extended to Continental Shelf Area, Oil Exploration Rights Granted." Dispatch #302. April 13, 1955. DOS Decimal Files: 1955-1959. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> American Congen POS, Report to DOS, December 1959. DOS, Decimal files, 1955-1959. RG 59. Box 1667. Maryland. US. National Archives..

<sup>71</sup> A US Government Agency. CO/1031/3576. File: A/327/04; 15 July 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>72</sup> *FRUS*, 1955-1957, "Economic and Technical Assistance." Vol. VI. p. 338. Maryland. US National Archives. pp. 338-339.

With the return to power of the PPP in 1957, there had been further emphasis on economic development in the colony. Cheddi Jagan's and the PPP's legitimacy rested on their promise to improve the living standards of the people. The US Administration had been perturbed by the evidence of the PPP's legitimacy. What had been even more bewildering for the US Department of State had been the fact that it had spent G \$1million in technical assistance to British Guiana over the three preceding years, but that this expenditure had not served to counteract "communist" influence. The British Ambassador in Washington was informed about the deep American concern over the PPP victory in 1957, since it was perceived as a precursor of "communist" penetration of other countries in the hemisphere.<sup>73</sup>

Notwithstanding Cheddi Jagan's efforts to reassure the US Administration of his moderation and his sensitivity to the concerns of potential foreign investors, the US Administration refused to abandon its hostility to the Jagans and the PPP. By December 1957, US policy toward British Guiana reflected continuing resistance to any accommodation with the PPP. The US Administration decided to establish an office of the United States Information Service (USIS) in the colony and to undertake a serious effort to identify possible alternative leadership to Cheddi Jagan.<sup>74</sup> The US Administration also decided that it would not support the idea of an American consultant doing a study of British Guiana's economic problems, as it did not wish to find itself in the embarrassing position of having to veto the recommendations of the adviser.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, when lack of financial assistance jeopardised the PPP 1958 Development Budget, Cheddi Jagan began mobilising local support for his next move. He raised alarm over the need for more foreign capital which, he said, could only be obtained through foreign loans, foreign investments and 'belt-tightening' by the Guianese population.<sup>76</sup> Cheddi Jagan decided to seek

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<sup>73</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Herter to AmCongen, Georgetown. Aug. 16, 1957. DOS Decimal Files: 1955-1959. RG. 59. Box 3205.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum, Dale to Jones, December 10, 1957. DOS Decimal Files, RG 59, Box 3205.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, "UK, USA and Canada may be approached for Money for D-Plan." 11 Feb. 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.

assistance from other countries, notably Canada and Switzerland, to enable the Guiana Government to carry out its development programmes.<sup>77</sup>

By mid 1958, the PPP Government, finding itself under economic constraints, called for Constitutional talks to be aimed at granting self-government to British Guiana in 1960.<sup>78</sup> With self-Government, Cheddi Jagan said that he would be able to seek loans from other sources, in order to deal with the problems of British Guiana.<sup>79</sup> Given the trend of economic deterioration, it was reported that unemployment in the colony could reach 91,000 by 1966.<sup>80</sup>

British aid to the colony might have been complicated because the British Government continued to regard Cheddi Jagan as a “political risk,”<sup>81</sup> which could explain the UK offer of G\$5 million only. A report in a local newspaper, The Daily Chronicle, claimed that “a well-informed source” had offered the following explanation: “I understand that the Government recognise the problems of British Guiana but they will tell Cheddi Jagan in effect: ‘It would be impossible when money is so tight here to make an exception of your case. Other colonies need money urgently too’.”<sup>82</sup>

This situation prompted another leading newspaper to support the PPP Government in the following statement: “Majority Party Cannot be Blamed for Unemployment situation.”<sup>83</sup> This put the blame for the colony’s woes on the shoulders of the British Government.

Due to international political developments, however, the American government had to shift its economic policy towards British Guiana. In the first months of 1959, the US Administration approved a loan for new industries in the colony. The US needed hemispheric support in its struggle

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<sup>77</sup> The Daily Chronicle, “UK, USA and Canada may be approached for Money for D-Plan”. 11 Feb. 1958...” Op. Cit., in fn. 75.

<sup>78</sup> The Daily Chronicle. “Early Self-Government Demand for British Guiana Expected.” 20 June 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> The Daily Chronicle, 12 July 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> The Daily Chronicle, 15 August 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> The Daily Chronicle, 2 July 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid..

<sup>83</sup> The Daily Argosy, 25 July 1958. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.



with the USSR and, more so, because President Eisenhower had rejected calls for increased defence spending: "Ike Opposes Increased Defence Spending; Balanced Budget for Next Year."<sup>84</sup>

This change in US policy came about as a result of the USSR advance in nuclear capacity and its 'no change' attitude on the Berlin question. The US anticipated that it would need all the support it could get from the region. Furthermore, in 1959 the US Administration had indeed been experiencing a challenge from Cuba where US-backed right-wing dictator, Fulgencio Batista, had been under severe attack from Fidel Castro's revolutionary movement.

The US Administration therefore needed support from whatever source it could get to combat the advance of communism. To this end Cheddi Jagan was invited to Washington for discussions with US Administration officials. While in Washington, Cheddi Jagan had met with officials of the State Department and the Development Loan Fund (DLF).<sup>85</sup>

Cheddi Jagan's willingness to visit Washington sought to demonstrate his desire to work with Washington. However, he was not satisfied with the amount of aid offered. Washington's cautious monetary budget was due to several factors: (i) the US worldwide commitments as a superpower; (ii) its support to its allies in the fight against communism on a global scale and (iii) high unemployment in the United States. These factors, together with President Eisenhower's refusal to increase the federal budget, and with the dollar under pressure, led the President to announce measures to reduce American spending abroad.<sup>86</sup>

In Cheddi Jagan's view, the US loan was insufficient for any significant work to be carried out in the colony. His next step, one that he must have realised would put him on a confrontation course with Washington, was to advise Governor Renison that he intended to ask the USSR, Japan and India for financial assistance to carry out his projects.<sup>87</sup> In the face of this and with improvements in the US economy in 1960, on 8 January 1960, a Project Agreement was signed between the ICA and the Governments of the US and British Guiana. This Project was undertaken

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<sup>84</sup> *The Daily Chronicle*, 10 January 1959. Georgetown. Guyana National archives. p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Cope's Memo to DOS. October 28, 1957. DOS Decimal Files, Box 4451. 1953-1957.

<sup>86</sup> *Annual Review 1960*, prepared by the British Foreign Office. 1 January 1961. Foreign Office Doc: FO/371/156435. File: A347/14; 14 Jan. 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>87</sup> Governor Renison had a guarded approach to Cheddi Jagan.

with the approval of the British Government.<sup>88</sup> It was a 5-year Programme (1960-1965) intended to address the colony's prospects for industrial development. The total cost was G\$50 million. From the report of a Survey carried out, it had been concluded that there was potential for the development of small industries in the field of light manufactures, processing, assembly, production of fabrics, extraction, servicing and marketing in the colony.<sup>89</sup> Given this potential, the money had to be found to carry out the projects. It was expected that the money would be provided by the DFL. Whether the Project would ever "get off the ground" would depend on Cheddi Jagan's attitude towards the Western Powers and his threat of going to the Soviet Bloc countries.

#### **ii) Foreign Operations Administration (FOA)<sup>90</sup>**

Another area where the US Government had offered to assist Britain in British Guiana had been in the technical field. Under the Foreign Overseas Assistance (FOA) Programme, the US had undertaken to give technical assistance and to train personnel in areas most needed in the colony. In 1955 the US Administration sponsored training courses in the USA and in Puerto Rico in the area of agriculture. Three Guianese attended courses in the USA and Puerto Rico.<sup>91</sup>

While the US Government was seeking to do what it could to assist economically in British Guiana, there were political voices in the United States critical of British inattention to the economic problems of the colony. One of these was US Senator Aiken.

#### **d. Senator Aiken's Charges about British Neglect of British Guiana**

British neglect of British Guiana was severely criticised by US Senator Aiken in 1958.<sup>92</sup> Concern for deteriorating economic conditions in British Guiana alarmed Senator Aiken and he blamed the British Government for the slow pace of development. Realising the seriousness of the

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<sup>88</sup> This was in keeping with the formal agreement of July 12, 1954, and further extended on July 13, 1959 for an additional period of 5 years between the Governments of the UK and of the USA relative to technical assistance to the Govt. of British Guiana by the ICA, a US Government Agency. CO/1031/3576. A/327/08, 15 July 1958. London. PRO.

<sup>89</sup> ICA was a US Government Agency. CO/1031/3576. File: A327/04, 15 July 1953. London. PRO.

<sup>90</sup> The FOA (Foreign Operations Administration) was coordinated by ICA.

<sup>91</sup> FOA Memorandum to Chief of Protocol, US Dept. of State. April 21, 1955 and Aug. 16, 1955. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1667. File: 1955-59. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>92</sup> The Daily Chronicle, 11 Feb. 1958. "British Cooperation can win US aid for B.G." Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 4.

state of the colony's economic outlook, he said: "...British Guiana is a country which potentially could swing away from the West." However, it was, as the Senator stated, "much less likely to do so if it receives sympathetic attention to its needs."<sup>93</sup>

In order to assess the situation in British Guiana, Senator Aiken paid a visit to the colony in 1958. After his visit, he concluded that: "...there was little point in continuing US assistance to the British Guiana Government unless there was established, from top to bottom, a good spirit of cooperation."<sup>94</sup> The United Kingdom, he said, had been increasingly less able to assist investments in the colony and yet there was resistance to US capital investment, either private or governmental. Moreover, he stated that British attitude toward the development in the colony had been ambivalent. In essence, what he was saying was that while Britain had not abandoned the colony through neglect, British Guiana had been, "...far down on the priority list of British investment plans." It was the negative attitude of the British Government to development in the colony that irked the Senator.

On 17 February 1958, The Daily Chronicle highlighted problems in the Colonial Government's economic policies for British Guiana. A headline story read: "US Senator's attack on British Attitude towards B.G. gets local support." The article stated:

"Among the common man, the Senator's charges are regarded as being long overdue. Several instances are cited of the handful of US experts having been obstructed by British Officials. Among this group there was strong feeling that the Housing Programme involved would have achieved far more if the US were given the free hand they deserved to have. It was claimed that in many cases stumbling blocks were placed in their way. Had there been a policy of more active cooperation the number of houses built would have been more than doubled."<sup>95</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

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<sup>93</sup> The Daily Chronicle., 11 Feb. 1958. "British Cooperation can win US aid for B.G." Op. Cit., fn. 90. p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid..

<sup>95</sup> Ibid..

In this chapter, we have examined British and American threat assessments in British Guiana, political developments in the country, and areas of UK-US cooperation in the colony. The following conclusions are striking from the material examined.

British-American determination to block the PPP communist-oriented party from leading British Guiana to independence continued throughout this period. Both the British and the American Governments tried unsuccessfully to “contain” the communist menace by pushing for British Guiana’s membership in the West Indies Federation and in regional pro-Western institutions such as the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Commission and its successor, the Caribbean Organisation.

Both Britain and the United States were influenced in the extent of economic assistance they would provide by the communist orientation of the PPP – notwithstanding that the Americans had identified the economic conditions as a nesting ground for communism. During this period, the colony remained in the grasp of the two powers, which were moved principally by Cold War considerations.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **ANGLO-AMERICAN COOPERATION ON BRITISH GUIANA, 1961-1966**

## **1. Introduction**

In this chapter, covering one of the most active periods for British Guiana, we shall look at UK-US cooperation from the following angles: (i) Diplomatic Cooperation; (ii) Economic Cooperation; (iii) Intelligence Cooperation (iv) Trade Union Cooperation; (v) Cooperation in International Organisations and (vi) Civil Society Cooperation with particular regard to the Church.

## **2. Diplomatic Cooperation**

UK-US Diplomatic Cooperation on British Guiana during the period 1961-1966 covered two main areas:

- a) The UK-USA Working Party on British Guiana
- b) The UK-US High-level Understanding

### **a. The Working Party**

The American and British Governments cooperated closely in monitoring British Guiana's path to independence and the US Administration influenced the framing of British Guiana's Independence Constitution. Since the PPP had come to power in British Guiana in April 1953, the US began to take a greater interest in the affairs of British Guiana. The leader of the PPP and other prominent members, the Eisenhower Administration concluded, were communists and it was therefore opposed from the beginning to have another communist Government entrenching itself in the Western hemisphere. To prevent such a situation from taking place, Anglo-American cooperation became crucial in the 1960s.

In the 1960s the mood in the US was very much anti-communist and this echoed across all sectors of society. The Vietnam War at this time had increased fears of the evils of communism and McCarthyism in the USA had already polarised the country. The US Senate debates on the impact of communism on US policies around the world further led to public outcry and condemnation of communism. By early 1961, the American public demonstrated a keen interest in the affairs of British Guiana. In the State of Washington, a constituent wrote to Senator Allot on 6 March 1961

inquiring what the US Government was doing about the situation in British Guiana. The Senator raised this issue when he asked the following:

Would you please advise me of the current situation in British Guiana, South America. Are we doing anything to prevent this from becoming a Communist state following the elections to be held in British Guiana this year. Does anyone know if Cheddi Jagan obtained a substantial loan from Castro? Does freedom of the press exist in British Guiana today?<sup>1</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Liaison, Mr. Hays replied assuring the Senator that the US "...was following closely reports on the political situation there..."<sup>2</sup> The US, he noted, had a Consulate in the colony and it was in close touch with local developments. Concerning the Cuban loan<sup>3</sup>, Hays told the Senator that a loan was offered by Cuba but that the British Government had not approved it. Hays, it appears, tried to assure the American public that the US Administration was vigilant to the danger that Cuba had posed to the United States.<sup>4</sup>

After the rise of Fidel Castro as the leader of Cuba in 1959, the US took a much sterner attitude toward Cheddi Jagan. By April 1961, the Bay of Pigs fiasco and a year later, the Cuban Missile crisis in October 1962, led to the US Administration's decision that Cheddi Jagan should not be permitted to succeed to power in an independent British Guiana. While recognising that the PPP Government would pose a threat to the United States, the latter could not depose the government and therefore it had to consider other options. One of the options was to help relieve the poor economic conditions then prevailing in the colony. Aid could thus be used as a tool of US foreign policy. The economic stagnation in the colony had become a top priority for Cheddi Jagan to address. Cheddi Jagan had developed an ambitious programme for development in the colony that the Colonial Government had been unable to finance alone, so Britain sought the assistance of the US Administration.

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<sup>1</sup> Senator Gordon Allot's letter to The Honorable Brooks Hays, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Liaison, Washington, D.C., March 6, 1961. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1960-1963. File: 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

President Kennedy decided to offer economic assistance but it had to be on American terms - which Cheddi Jagan felt he could not accept. Cheddi Jagan showed a keen interest in accepting aid from the US but it had to be “without any strings attached”, as he put it. The alternative, he declared, is to seek and accept assistance from any quarters willing to provide it.<sup>5</sup> The ambiguous pronouncements by Cheddi Jagan had led to misunderstandings between the US Administration and the PPP Government. In fact, the US Administration had become sceptical about Cheddi Jagan’s motives and it began to question his real intentions. This issue had led to serious tension between Cheddi Jagan and the US Administration.

Persistent US concerns about the future of British Guiana under the PPP can be seen from the record of the National Security Council meeting of May 5, 1961. The subject discussed at this meeting was: “US Policy Toward British Guiana.”<sup>6</sup> The record of this meeting indicated that the US and the British Government had been actively working together for weeks on the question of what could be done to forestall a communist take-over in British Guiana.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter a series of Anglo-American meetings took place as events warranted them.

#### **i. Anglo-American Meeting, 1 April 1961**

The year 1961 was a crucial one in the political development of British Guiana. British Guiana was advancing toward independence. It was an election year and a new Constitution would come into force.<sup>8</sup> The US Government therefore wanted to ensure that its provisions were to American satisfaction.

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<sup>5</sup> Anglo-American Working Party, “Economic Background. British Guiana.” FO/371/155721; File:A/347/03. 6 March 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum from the Executive Secretary of the Dept. of State (Battle) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy). Washington, May 19, 1961: National Security Files, Country Series, British Guiana. May 19-Aug. 23, 1961. See also *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. XII: “US National Security.” Boston, JFK Library.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>8</sup> A new Constitution came into force on 26 June 1961 which provided for internal self-government. “Intel” # 98, July 28, 1961. FO/371/155701; File: A/347/0. 30 July, 1961. London, PRO.



Two weeks prior to the Bay of Pigs incident, an Anglo-American meeting was convened to discuss, *inter alia*, the situation of British Guiana. The linking of British Guiana and Cuba was occasioned by close ties the PPP had with the Castro regime. The US and the British Governments were well aware of Cheddi Jagan's support for Castro; therefore US thinking was that, should Castro gain the upper hand, (which he eventually did) Cheddi Jagan would be encouraged by Castro's success and would proceed to defy the US. In the US psyche, to see the entrenchment of two communist countries south of its border would weaken US power everywhere in the world while, on the other hand, it would strengthen that of the Soviet Union. Two of the most powerful NATO members would have been weakened thus rendering the Western defence system poorer against Soviet aggression.

At the meeting on 1 April 1961, the British Government showed a greater willingness to cooperate with the US Administration. Britain was aware that it was unable to provide the entire £25 million for British Guiana's Development Plan for 1960-1964. It depended on the US to finance a large portion of this Plan together with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Development Loan Fund.<sup>9</sup> At this meeting the two Governments agreed to consult each other on matters relating to British Guiana before either one took any action.

With elections approaching, US fears about a PPP victory had not dissipated. On August 11, 1961 US Secretary of State Dean Rusk wrote to Lord Home expressing US concerns about the possibility of a victory for Cheddi Jagan's party. He stated:

“No doubt you would expect us to show considerable sensitivity about the prospect of Castroism in the Western Hemisphere and that we are not inclined to give people like Jagan the same benefit of the doubt which was given two or three years ago to Castro himself.”<sup>10</sup>

The memo further revealed that the US Administration had planned to go much further to influence the elections of 1961. It had discussed with the Colonial Office how to find ways of manipulating

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<sup>9</sup> Anglo-American Working Party Discussions, Report, 7 April 1961. FO/371/155721; File: 347/07, 9 April 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Telegram from US Secretary of State Rusk to Lord Home, 11 August 1961. London. PRO. See also *FRUS*, 1961-1963. Volume VII. National Security Files, Country Series: British Guiana, 19 May – 23 August, 1961. Boston, JFK Library.

the election process in order to prevent a PPP victory. Rusk would later send Ivan White to London to talk with MacLeod and to see what the British could do “to...forestall such an eventuality.”<sup>11</sup> The British, however, were not persuaded and said: “...we are convinced that the only possible policy we can follow, and the most fruitful one, is to treat British Guiana like any other dependency and to try to “educate” its elected leaders unless and until we have clear justification for doing otherwise...”<sup>12</sup>

## ii. Anglo-American Discussions, 27 August 1961

The Working Party convened on 27 August 1961 to assess the election results and its implications for British Guiana and the US Administration. The Bay of Pigs fiasco on 17 April 1961 and its implications for the US in the Caribbean had led to a hardening of Kennedy’s position toward British Guiana. Cuba was now seen as a potential center for communist penetration in the hemisphere. The US response to combat communism in the region was launching of The Alliance for Progress, the “Marshall Plan for Latin America” as Henry Kissinger referred to it.<sup>13</sup>

The PPP victory on 21 August 1961 led to heightened fears within the US Administration. Jagan’s message at his Press Conference on 24 August 1961, at which he indicated his willingness to accept aid from anywhere,<sup>14</sup> would push the US to become further enmeshed in the affairs of British Guiana. This could be seen in William Tyler’s Congressional briefing in September 1961. He stated: “the recently approved policy toward British Guiana represents a new departure from our previous ‘hands off’ attitude toward the colony.”<sup>15</sup>

Washington’s anxiety and concern were in evidence in the exchange of memoranda between the US State Department and the British Foreign Office. They revealed US frustration in the British attitude to the threat that the PPP posed and which the US State Department had begun alerting the

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<sup>11</sup> Message from US Secretary of State Rusk to British Foreign Secretary Home. London. August 18, 1961. See also *FRUS: 1961-1963*. Vol. X11, Op. Cit., in fn. 10. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Henry Kissinger, *American Diplomacy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1979, pp. 50-55.

<sup>14</sup> Jagan’s Press Conference, 24 August, 1961. *Guiana Graphic*, 25 August 1961. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives

<sup>15</sup> William Tyler’s Memo to Alexis Johnson, 14 September 1961. US Decimal Files, RG 59, 1960-1963. Box 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

British Government. Secretary of State Rusk's memorandum of 11 August 1961 to Lord Home clearly expressed US continued fears thus:

Dear Alex: There was one matter of deep concern to us ...(Y)our and our information about Jagan seems to be much the same, as is to be expected from our close collaboration, I believe that our estimate may differ somewhat about the man himself and the implications of his future leadership in British Guiana... However, we do believe that Jagan and his American wife are very far to the left indeed and that his accession to power in British Guiana would be a most troublesome setback in this Hemisphere....<sup>16</sup>

The PPP victory at the 21 August 1961 elections drew a swift response from the US Department of State to British Foreign Secretary, Lord Home: "...Unpalatable as the result is to us, our task now is to determine where we go from here."<sup>17</sup>

Finally, we see that the UK Foreign Office was beginning to heed the US call for them to take some kind of action. It could no longer ignore US concerns since they both needed each other to carry on the struggles in a Cold War climate that had committed the two Governments. The British Government, which had agreed to meet with US officials, now sought a more dominant role in setting the agenda. It had emphasised to the US Administration that the talks had to be "...in the political and economic spheres, if we are to expect rewarding dividends."<sup>18</sup>

From Cheddi Jagan's rhetoric, it had become evident to both the British and the US Administrations that Cheddi Jagan's proposed economic planning strategies paralleled those of a controlled economy. Jagan's commitment to the establishment of a socialist state had persuaded the British Colonial Government to take US concerns into consideration when it decided to cooperate.

Furthermore, the British Government stated that it did not wish to be accused of being the one responsible for the establishment of a communist regime in Latin America. This decision taken by the British Government must have pleased US Senator Thomas Dodd (Democrat of Connecticut), a militant anti-communist. Sensing the implications for US foreign policy in the

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<sup>16</sup> Telegram from DOS to US Embassy, London. August 11, 1961. National Security Files. Country Series. "British Guiana". May 19-Aug. 23, 1961. See also *FRUS*, 1961-1963, Vol. XII. US National Security... Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>17</sup> Message from US Secretary of State Rusk to British Foreign Secretary Home, August 18, 1961. See also *FRUS* 1961-63. Volume X11. Maryland. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from UK Foreign Office to US Dept. of State, 2 Sept. 1961. FO/371/155721. File: A/347/08, 3 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

region, he suggested to the Kennedy Administration in his address to the Senate on 1 September 1961 that, "the US and Great Britain should agree on steps to preserve British Guiana's freedom."<sup>19</sup> By recognizing these factors, the British had become convinced that British Guiana under British rule must be prolonged even if that meant renegeing on the Formula<sup>20</sup> agreed to at the 1960 Independence Conference, London.<sup>21</sup>

Britain's decision to collaborate with the US had put it at variance with Cheddi Jagan and the ensuing discord between these two parties had a devastating effect on the colony for the next three years. The US Administration's determination to effect change is summed up by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who warned Sir Alex Douglas Home that:

"If Jagan's behaviour in the Legislature since 1953 was a good 'guidepost' for the future of the colony, then the US was now more than ever convinced that the colony should not be granted independence under Cheddi Jagan."<sup>22</sup>

The decision of both the US and the UK Governments to continue working with the PPP, was only a measure to project a positive attitude towards Cheddi Jagan, particularly on the part of the Kennedy Administration. The colony was on the road to independence in the near future, possibly in 1962, or the latest in May 1963. The Kennedy Administration could not rely on the British Government to attend to its interests - nor its sensitivities over British Guiana and the implications this would have for the region at large.

Two of the main items discussed at the meeting on 27 August 1961 were (i) a review of the PPP personalities in the new Legislature and (ii) the voting pattern since 1953.<sup>23</sup> The more important of these had been the voting pattern, which was the focus of the discussion. During this

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<sup>19</sup> Independence Conference, London, 1960. FO/371/155720. File: A/347/09. Note 494, 1 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>20</sup> The formula was that following the elections in 1961, there would be a two-year waiting period, after which the local legislature could call on the Secretary of State to summon a Conference to "consider when it would be practicable to implement independence." If, on the other hand, independence, was meanwhile granted to the West Indies Federation, this waiting period was to be reduced to one year

<sup>21</sup> Senator Dodd's Address to the US Senate on 1 Sept. 1961. File: FO/371/61946. File: A347/09, 3 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>22</sup> Secretary of State Dean Rusk's letter to Sir Alex Douglas Home, 29 March 1962. FO/371/161947. File: A347/09, 2 April 1962. London, PRO.

<sup>23</sup> UK-USA Working Party Meeting on "Results of the British Guiana Elections," 27 August 1961, FO/371/155721. File: A/345/09. 7 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

review, it was noted that there was a steady decrease in the percentage of votes for the PPP though the Party obtained the largest number of votes cast. Based on this pattern, it had been noted that, in the future the number of new East Indian voters would increase faster than that of the African, and that Cheddi Jagan's party would slowly but steadily gain a larger proportion of the votes cast at future elections but not the largest percentage of the votes.<sup>24</sup>

### iii. Anglo-American Working Party, 11-13 September 1961

Despite the misgivings of the US Administration about the PPP, it had come to realise the wisdom of adhering to the British position to try and assist the PPP Government. The State Department, with an eye on the prospect of early independence for the colony, possibly within the next two years, continued to review its own interests against another likely communist regime in the region. Keeping this in mind, its agenda for further discussions with the UK Foreign Office consisted of the following: (1) to offer Jagan technical and economic assistance; (2) to prepare the way for admission of an independent British Guiana to the OAS and the Alliance for Progress; (3) to give Jagan a friendly reception during his visit to the US in October 1961 and for him to meet with President Kennedy, and (4) a covert programme.<sup>25</sup>

However much the US Administration tried, its efforts to come to terms on working with Jagan proved unsuccessful. The US Administration was determined to pursue a tough policy of opposition to Cheddi Jagan in the face of British half-heartedness. There had been powerful voices in the US Congress and Senate that were calling on the Government to take action against the communists in British Guiana. In the Senate questions were being asked why the US Government had been supporting a communist Government in British Guiana. Senator Dodd, an anti-communist, was critical of the Government's role in aiding a communist government. The Senator insisted that the IBRD loan offered to Cheddi Jagan had been an unnecessary boost to Jagan in the eyes of his

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<sup>24</sup> UK-USA Working Party Meeting on "Results of the British Guiana Elections." *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>25</sup> Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Schlesinger) to President Kennedy on "British Guiana," Washington, August 30, 1961. FO/371/15570. File: A347/08, 3 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

supporters but cited no evidence for this assertion.<sup>26</sup> Whether the IBRD had contributed to the PPP success at the August elections, as the Senator's statement seemed to be suggesting, is questionable. The establishment of another communist state in the region would have had wider repercussions, beyond the Caribbean and Latin American regions. For the US to be seen as being soft on communism in Latin American would have made it more difficult for the Administration to deal with the Soviet Union on issues in Asia and Eastern Europe.

At this point the British Government was concentrating on an independence agenda for the colony under Jagan, who they considered to be the best man available, and a person they could work with. Furthermore, Britain could not afford to support an empire any longer. This was contrary to US thinking. The strategy that the US Department of State adopted was to convince the British Government to continue its control over the colony for as long as possible. There were intense discussions on this question at the September meeting.<sup>27</sup> To compromise, the US Administration agreed that Cheddi Jagan would meet with President Kennedy during his visit to Washington and that it would offer Cheddi Jagan some kind of financial assistance. The Colonial Office felt that it would be important to encourage Cheddi Jagan in the first few weeks of his new administration to show him Western friendship.

Cooperation between the US and UK on a timetable for British Guiana's Independence agreed to at the Constitutional Conference of 1960 had been reaffirmed at this meeting.<sup>28</sup> The two Governments had further pledged themselves to consult with each other in the event of any changes.<sup>29</sup> Any change, they sensed, would only further arouse Cheddi Jagan's anger and could push him to seek redress at the UN. Such a scenario was to be avoided at all cost, because at the UN the subject would become a Cold War issue.

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum of conversation on "Election Results in British Guiana," Sept. 6, 1961. FO/371/15571. File: A/347/09, 5 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>27</sup> "American Press and Radio Comment." Telegram from Washington to Foreign Office. # 494. Sept. 1, 1961. FO/371/15570. File: A347/09; 3 Sept 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>28</sup> Telegram # 2324 from AMEMBASSY, London to Secretary of State, Dec. 14, 1961. DOS Decimal Files; RG 59. 1961-1963. Box: 1667. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum from British Foreign Office to Washington on "British Guiana Independence." January 12, 1962. FO/371/00234, # 61. File: A347/12. File: 12 Jan. 1962. London. PRO.

#### **iv. Anglo-American Working Party, December, 1-4, 1962**

During 1962 the situation in the colony had deteriorated, bordering on chaos. By February 1962, the US Administration had hoped that its efforts to woo Cheddi Jagan would improve relations. Instead, the US Administration became very frustrated with the PPP Government's policies. In the PPP Government's new annual budget proposals announced in February, the Government called for the establishment of a compulsory saving scheme, it imposed export duties on goods produced by foreign companies and a capital gains tax. These moves led to the outbreak of violence which deteriorated as the Government failed to convince the British Colonial Authorities of their viability. The measures introduced in the Budget would have affected principally foreign companies operating in the colony with lesser impact on local private businesses. Opposition from foreign businesses collided with the Jagan's determination to continue to press for change. The 'stand-off' led to strikes and demonstrations in the country, which deteriorated into violence.

The disturbances lent support to the US Administration's opposition to Cheddi Jagan's leadership. They continued to believe that Cheddi Jagan was an incompetent leader. In fact, matters went out of control and Cheddi Jagan had to request assistance from Governor Grey for British reinforcements.

British Guiana was once again plunged into chaos. Racial tension surfaced in a major way and became a force to be reckoned with in the future. The strikes in the sugar industry called by the British Guiana Trade Union Council (BGTUC), in the US view further undermined Cheddi Jagan's credibility as a leader. Could President Kennedy rely on the British Government to control Jagan? Would the British Government support US toughness toward Jagan? Remembering British support for Cuba in defiance of the US request in 1960s to cut off trade with the Cuban Government, the US Administration had little confidence in the British Government. This attitude became clear in Secretary of State Dean Rusk's message of February 1962 to Lord Home in which he stated "...I

must tell you now that I have reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan...”<sup>30</sup>

This frustration and disappointment grew also out of increasing US concern over Cuba and added to this was the growing concern of the US public and Congress that opposed any US dealings with Cheddi Jagan’s Government.<sup>31</sup> Cheddi Jagan no longer had the confidence of Secretary of State Rusk who had by then concluded that the policy he was following had put strains between the US and the UK Governments. Conditions in the colony were deteriorating and the colony was heading to disaster, or so the US Administration believed. The US Administration found itself helpless to intervene openly to arrest what they did not like. Secretary of State Rusk went so far as to equate the situation in the colony to the events of 1953. In that year, the British had suspended the Constitution but in 1962 they wanted to grant independence to the colony.

Unable to take independent action against the PPP Government, Dean Rusk stated US position bluntly to Lord Home, that: “...These considerations, I believe, make it mandatory that we concert on remedial steps...and I hope we can agree that Jagan should not accede to power again.”<sup>32</sup> Secretary of State Rusk had concluded that the US could no longer tolerate Cheddi Jagan at the head of the British Guiana Government. The British indeed did not see ‘eye to eye’ on the matter at all. There was a fundamental difference between the two Governments’ perception of the nature of the colony’s problem. The British Government and Colonial Officials had often times stated that it was racial tension fostered by Forbes Burnham that was the central problem in the colony and not communism as the US Administration had stated.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rusk’s memorandum to Lord Home, 19 Feb. 1962. J F K Papers: NSF, Countries. Box 15A: 2/62-8/62. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Fraser’s Report on British Guiana, 10 March 1962. CO/1030/155721. File” A/345/02, 12 March 1962 London. PRO.



Colonial Official Fraser, who visited British Guiana in March 1962 to carry out an on-the-spot investigation of the disturbances, did not think that the problem was communism, but racial tension fostered by Forbes Burnham. This subject was still a point of disagreement between the two governments. Fraser claimed that the chaos in British Guiana was the result of the US Government failure to send the long overdue economic mission to British Guiana. Fraser felt that Cheddi Jagan "was a nice man surrounded by mildly sinister advisers..."<sup>34</sup> The outcome of this review had forced the US Administration to reconsider its position on aid to the colony. It ended with the US agreeing to assist the colony.

It is revealed that the British Government was looking for a quid pro quo from the US Government. British Foreign Secretary Home shared his thoughts with US Secretary of State Rusk on British Guiana. He said:

"I do so not only because I think this is right between us, but because you have shown in the conversations which the two of us have had, I take comfort from your letter to think that you will be ready to understand and support us in solving these problems. ... Let us by all means try and do what is possible to prevent the communists and others from perverting our common aim of doing our best to assure a timely and orderly development of independence in the remaining dependent territories."<sup>35</sup>

On March 15, 1962 British Guiana was again discussed at a National Security Council meeting.<sup>36</sup> From these meetings it emerged that President Kennedy had met with Fraser on March 16, 1962 in Washington. Fraser had stressed to the President the need for the US to dispatch an economic team to Georgetown.<sup>37</sup> Following that meeting, William Burdett of the Department of State was sent immediately to Georgetown and Consul Melby consulted with Washington at the

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<sup>34</sup> Ball's Memorandum to AMEMBASSY, London. March 20, 1962. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Folder: British Guiana. 3/62-5/62. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>35</sup> British Foreign Secretary Home's letter to US Secretary of State Rusk. February 26, 1962. Papers of President Kennedy; NSF Folder: British Guiana, 3/62-5/62. Box 15A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>36</sup> Two pages of the memorandum have been withdrawn from the folder hence one does not know what proposals were put forward nor what decisions were taken.

<sup>37</sup> White House Official, Ralph Dungan's memorandum to McGeorge Bundy. March 20, 1962. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF Folder: British Guiana, 3/62-5/62. Box 15A. Boston. JFK Library.

highest level.<sup>38</sup> Burdett's visit to Georgetown was to assess the implications of the recent disturbances for US policy in the colony. He held discussions with political leaders in British Guiana, Trinidad<sup>39</sup> and Jamaica. These steps had been taken in preparation for the US Administration to hold further discussions with the British Government. On 19 March 1962, Hugh Fraser met President Kennedy in Washington followed by meetings with British and US Government representatives to appraise British Guiana's economic situation and Western policies toward the colony.

#### v **Anglo-American Working Party, 17-18 December 1964**

Talks between British and US officials took place in London on December 17 and 18, 1964. The US had an historic and geographical interest in developments in British Guiana and the US Government, as the British pointed out, had been naturally much more concerned about the possible establishment of a Government with communist sympathies. The UK Government had kept the US Authorities closely informed of events and its policies toward British Guiana.<sup>40</sup>

The US Administration expressed its satisfaction with the results of the August 1964 elections in which the PPP did not obtain a majority of the votes cast. The Administration anticipated a coalition of the PNC and UF parties to head the next Government.

There were discussions on the future of the East Indians whose population had been increasing at a higher rate than the other races. The US Administration demonstrated its pleasure at Cheddi Jagan's defeat but lamented the lack of an alternative East Indian Party.<sup>41</sup> One could interpret this attitude to mean that the Administration would have preferred to see an East Indian

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<sup>38</sup> Lucius Battle's Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy. March 19, 1962. Subject: "British Guiana." Papers of JFK. NSF Folder: Countries: British Guiana, General. 3/62-5/62. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>39</sup> Burdett was to meet with Hochoy, Dr. Eric Williams and others in Trinidad and Messrs. Manley and Bustamante in Jamaica. Ball's memorandum to Melby, Georgetown, March 20, 1962. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Folder: British Guiana, 3/62-5/62. Box 15A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>40</sup> Anglo-American Discussions: "British Guiana"; 17-19 December, 1964 held in London. Doc. FO/371/179144; File: A10110/13G, 19 Dec. 1964. London. PRO.

<sup>41</sup> Anglo-American Discussions: "British Guiana." Ibid., in fn. 40.

Party led by someone other than Jagan to be the head of the Government. Despite this, what was needed in the country by 1964 was healing of the nation. The racial tension had risen to heights of unacceptable behaviour and it needed a person who could unite the two major races.

During the discussions, US Officials had re-iterated the US position in very precise terms, “that so long as Cheddi Jagan’s party formed the government or any part of the government of British Guiana, there could be no question of US financial aid to the territory...”<sup>42</sup> This statement is quite clear and one that the PPP must have had to wrestle with. Cheddi Jagan and the PPP were synonymous, which meant that the PPP had to quit the political scene in order to save British Guiana from economic disaster. The objective of the US had been to break down the monolithic Indian support for the PPP in the hope of attracting other East Indian representation that would eventually develop as a non-communist party and one that would be supported by all the races.<sup>43</sup>

During these talks, the British Government announced its aid for British Guiana for 1965 and finally succumbed to US pressure not to consider independence for British Guiana at that time.<sup>44</sup>

During the discussions the question of racial harmony became much more of a concern for the US Administration. The areas to which attention had to be focused were in the public service and the police force that were dominated by Africans. Nevertheless, all that US Officials could hope for was that Forbes Burnham would be a responsible leader and would encourage racial harmony.

#### **b. The Understanding**

There is substantial evidence in the archival materials that President Kennedy and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, and subsequently Presidents Johnson and Prime Minister Harold Wilson, addressed the issue of British Guiana and decided on a course of action to be taken in light of the elections results leading up to the granting of independence to British Guiana in 1966.

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<sup>42</sup> Anglo-American Discussions: “British Guiana.” Op. Cit..

<sup>43</sup> Anglo-American Discussions: “British Guiana.” Ibid..

<sup>44</sup> Anglo-American Discussions. “British Guiana.” Ibid..

On April 4, 1961 National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy wrote a memorandum to the new President, John F. Kennedy, appraising him of one of the trouble spots for the US in their hemisphere, namely, British Guiana. As to the British position on British Guiana, McGeorge Bundy wrote:

“The British seem motivated chiefly by a desire to see British Guiana become independent...Since 1953 they have tried to overlook Jagan’s communist associations and refrain from antagonizing him. They do not appear willing to interfere with internal political developments and probably feel Jagan will be tamed by governmental responsibility.”<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, he stated that Cheddi and Janet Jagan, “...have a long history of communist associations. Both have visited Cuba and expressed admiration for the Castro regime...”<sup>46</sup>

The impact of Castro’s rise to power in Cuba in 1959 was not lost upon the US Administration. Castro was seen as an example to be emulated by many Caribbean leaders, and Cheddi Jagan of British Guiana was no exception. Cheddi Jagan had praised Castro for the changes that he had brought about for the people in Cuba, though such changes did not meet with the approval of the US Administration. Cheddi and Janet Jagan had both associated themselves with Castro and had visited Cuba in 1960. They saw Castro as a great liberator of the oppressed. This rapprochement of these two leaders was viewed with deep suspicion by the US Administration since both the Jagans were considered to be communists by the US Administration. Within the PPP the US had also identified other prominent members whom they considered to be communists.

The growing mistrust by the US of Cheddi Jagan and his Party is expressed in Bundy’s memorandum of 4 April 1961 to President Kennedy on the Jagans’ admiration of Castro and their long history of communist associations.<sup>47</sup> Added to this situation, the prospects of bringing about change in British Guiana through the polls surely could not have given comfort to President

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<sup>45</sup> The Agenda for Prime Minister Macmillan’s Visit to Washington, April 27-29, 1962. Agenda Item III - Topical Questions: “... British Guiana.” President’s Office Files, Countries: UK. Box 127A. Note: The last page of the discussions was sanitized, thus one does not know what advice Bundy had given to President Kennedy for his discussions with his British counterpart. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>46</sup> McGeorge Bundy’s memorandum to President Kennedy: “The Situation in British Guiana.” April 4, 1961. President Office Files, Countries: UK. Box 127A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>47</sup> McGeorge Bundy’s memorandum to President Kennedy. Ibid.

Kennedy. The statistics were in favour of the PPP, which was supported by the East Indians, the majority race in the colony. President Kennedy therefore, had to seek the cooperation of the British Government, even though they did not share the same concerns, in bringing about changes in British Guiana and for reasons explained elsewhere in this study, but only when the US Administration decided to do carry out those changes.

The Bay of Pigs incident on 17 April 1961, which humiliated the US Administration, had hardened President Kennedy's attitude toward an independent Guiana under Cheddi Jagan. The global communist menace, as the US would refer to it, (Vietnam, Laos, Angola and Cuba) was perceived to be directed by the Soviet Union, which was suspected of direct involvement in the internal affairs of these countries. In the East–West conflict the US Administration was determined to defend the Latin American hemisphere against communist infiltration and to this end President Kennedy consulted with his British counterpart, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in Washington on 27-29 April 1962. The "Agenda for Discussion" of this meeting included "British Guiana."<sup>48</sup> Further talks were held with British Government Officials on 30 September 1962 which addressed some of the other larger issues mentioned above.<sup>49</sup> A follow up consultation took place on 30 June 1963 between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, at Birch Grove House, England.<sup>50</sup> The subject of British Guiana was noted in passing by President Kennedy in his letter of thanks to Prime Minister Macmillan. The message here was that the US had not forgotten about British Guiana, its people were following closely and actively the evolution of British Guiana happening in the colony and that they were reviewing the situation.

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<sup>48</sup> Prime Minister Macmillan's Visit to Washington, April 27-28, 1962,. "Agenda Item III – Topical Questions" item # 4: "British Guiana." President's Office Files, Countries (UK). Box 127A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>49</sup> The British Government Officials were: Foreign Secretary Lord Home, British Ambassador to the US Ormsby-Gore. The US Government Officials were: Secretary of State Rusk, Under Secretary of State George Ball and US Ambassador to the UK, David Bruce. The meeting lasted two hours. President's Office Files. Countries (UK). Box 127A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>50</sup> See "Communiqué between President John F. Kennedy and the Right Honorable Harold Macmillan," following discussions at Birch Grove House, Sussex, England, June 30, 1963. President's Office Files. Country (UK). Box 127. Boston. J.F.K. Library. 2 pps. There is no mention of any discussions/agreement on British Guiana. However, it was later made clear in President Kennedy's letter of 11 July 1963 to PM Macmillan that an Understanding had been reached at Birch Grove.

It is clear that by this time the US Administration had decided that they would not put up with Jagan at the head of any government in an independent Guiana and was putting the British on notice. The following statement of President Kennedy is clear:

I have also started immediate inquiries on British Guiana, in light of our conversation, and I think I should warn you that our people do not think there is any realistic prospect of success in strengthening Burnham's numerical support. But I have told them to have another hard look and on the basis of what they tell me next week, I will be in touch with you again..."<sup>51</sup>

The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 had played a crucial role in the decisions taken by the US Administration thereafter. The USSR role and commitment to defend President Castro had serious implications for US hemispheric security policies and we see a hardening of the US Administration's position in subsequent actions.

On 11 July 1963, President Kennedy told the British Prime Minister, "...it is essential and the heart of the matter that we should continue to see eye to eye on the basic point that independence for British Guiana under Jagan would have the most destructive consequences in the United States and in the hemisphere as a whole."<sup>52</sup> Similarly, when President Johnson prepared to receive the newly elected Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, he was advised to get the Prime Minister to agree that Anglo-American cooperation on British Guiana was beneficial to both countries' interests and should continue.<sup>53</sup>

The Labour Government of Prime Minister Wilson, which had a slender majority in the House of Commons, faced severe economic problems at home. After a long period in opposition, it was in quest of recognition and basically accepted the commitment of its predecessor. It implemented the Conservative Government's blue print. It would not be unfair to say that the

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<sup>51</sup> President Kennedy's memorandum to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, 4 July 1963. President's Office Files. Countries: UK. Box 127A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>52</sup> President Kennedy's Message to British Prime Minister Macmillan, 11 July 1963. President's Office Files. Countries: UK. Box 127A. This was on the agreement that was reached at Birch Grove on 30 June 1963. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>53</sup> See memorandum for the President prepared by McGeorge Bundy, dated 26 Oct. 1964 and written on the occasion of the forthcoming visit of British Foreign Secretary Gordon Walker to the USA. Box 213. National Security. File: Country: UK. Walker talks with President and others..." Document 23 B. Austin, Texas. LBJ Library.

Anglo-American cooperation on British Guiana during this period was basically on American terms.

On 18 July 1963 Prime Minister Harold Macmillan advised President Kennedy of the British Government's decision "...to impose a system of proportional representation without a referendum and then to hold elections under a new system". He also informed the American President of the British Government's expectation that it would have to "renew direct rule for a period of six months to a year while a new constitution is introduced and new elections held under it."<sup>54</sup>

Following ensuing contacts, President Kennedy and Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home reached an understanding that there would be no independent British Guiana before 3 November 1964,<sup>55</sup> in view no doubt, of the American Presidential elections in the first week November 1964. In a Memorandum to Lyndon Johnson dated 26 October 1964, McGeorge Bundy advised him as follows:

...In connection with British Guiana you may also want to tell Gordon-Walker face to face of the understanding which President Kennedy and you had with Prime Minister Home--that there would be no independent British Guiana before November 3. That undertaking runs out now but there is still a deep common interest in avoiding a communist British Guiana.<sup>56</sup>

Earlier in the year, when Alec Douglas-Home visited Lyndon Johnson, the briefing papers prepared for the President sought to have the understanding maintained and upheld. British Guiana did come up in the conversations with the visiting United Kingdom party but was not mentioned in the Joint Communiqué issued by the President and the Prime Minister following their discussions on 12 and 13 February 1964. They did, however, note that:

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<sup>54</sup> Cited in Memorandum for the President from Mc George Bundy dated 6 February, 1964, written on the occasion of the forthcoming visit of British Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home to the USA. Box. 213, National Security File, Country : UK. President, 1963-1969. Document 23b. Austin, Texas. LBJ Library.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy dated 26 Oct. 1964, written on the occasion of the forthcoming visit of British Foreign Secretary, Gordon Walker to the USA. *Ibid*, in note 53.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in, "Memo for the President" from McGeorge Bundy, 26 Oct. 1964. File: UK-Walker Talks with President and others..." Document 23B. Box 213. Texas. LBJ Library. See further, the text of a Joint Communiqué by the US President and the Prime Minister of the UK following Discussions held in Washington, D.C., Feb. 12-13, 1964; Interview in *Reporter*, "PM Home visit 12-13 February, 1964", 13 Feb 1964. Box. 211. National Security File: UK 1963-1964; Country File: UK. Texas. LBJ Library. Earlier references had been made to this understanding in the LBJ library files for 1964 on relations with the UK but the substance had been deleted. However, this was apparently overlooked in the documents cited above.

The President stressed his concern at the present situation in the Caribbean area and the subversive and disruptive influence of the present Cuban regime. The Prime Minister fully recognized the importance of the development of Latin America in conditions of freedom and political and economic stability. Both expressed their belief that a valuable contribution can be made by Europe to this end.<sup>57</sup>

The US Administration's objectives for British Guiana at the start of 1964 had still been to prevent a second communist state in Latin America and, if necessary, for the United Kingdom to re-impose direct rule. However, the British Government had been reluctant to envisage this course because of reasons of public image and the implications of such a decision. British hesitation to pursue such a course is explained in a memorandum dated 7 February 1964 from the American Embassy in London to William Burdett of the White House staff:

...it might be advisable to explore further Secretary Rusk's suggestion to Sandys that the US and UK look for some way other than direct rule for coping with some of the problems direct rule would solve.

We do not know how HMG would respond to concrete proposals along these lines, although comments above on avoiding a showdown with Jagan would probably be relevant.<sup>58</sup>

On February 6, 1964 in preparation for Alex Douglas Home's meeting with Lyndon Johnson, McGeorge Bundy wrote Lyndon Johnson the following Memorandum on British Guiana:

Secretary Rusk thinks that the private agreement between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan was not limited in time. My own recollection is very different, and my private impression is that this conversation included only Kennedy and Macmillan and that both Rusk and I are relying on second-hand recollection.

In any event, it is most important to have a clear private understanding with Home, as Kennedy did with Macmillan, that the British will not allow the independence of British Guiana under a Jagan government before 3 November 1964, under any circumstances (although of course we cannot bind Harold Wilson). Since this Kennedy/Macmillan agreement, reached at Birch Grove on 30 June 1963, there has been (text sanitised) working on the British Guiana situation. I have seen the US coordinator on this and have kept in close touch with David Ormsby Gore and you may wish to say to Home that you hope this cooperation can continue. Our professionals are somewhat more hardnosed than the British and

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<sup>57</sup> High Level Meeting between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan and their officials at Birch Grove on 30 June 1963, *Op. Cit.* in note 50 above.

<sup>58</sup> MEMCON of 20 Dec. 1964 from AMEMBASSY, London to Mr. Burdett. Box. 213. File: Prime Minister Home Visit 2/12-13/64. Doc. 22a. Texas. LBJ Library



would like to see the British resume direct government and throw Jagan out. Neither Rusk nor I feel as strongly as the intelligence people on this, because there is much force in the British argument that such action, unless fully justified by Jagan's behaviour, would only make Jagan a martyr.

The British Minister in charge of British Guiana is Duncan Sandys, and the British plan is to have a proportional representation election which we would try to make sure that Jagan did not win. This is a good plan, but it has not been pressed with much energy by the British in recent months because of all the other problems facing Sandys in other parts of the world. That in itself does not matter very much to us, because British Guiana is not an explosive problem to us unless and until it becomes independent with Communists in charge.

I have always supposed myself that an independent Jagan government would be literally unacceptable to US and that we would have to make sure that it was overthrown, by hook or crook. The whole object of the present exercise is to avoid having to face this choice in 1964 if possible.<sup>59</sup>

The year 1964 was an election year for the USA and a crucial one at that. In October 1964, a Labour Government came to power in Britain. The Labour Government favoured Britain granting independence to British Guiana which made it all the more crucial that President Johnson tie the newly-elected Labour Government to the understanding Presidents Kennedy and Johnson had made with the Conservative Government. McGeorge Bundy therefore advised President Johnson to discuss British Guiana with British Foreign Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker: "The US Intelligence Estimates,<sup>60</sup> (text sanitized)" according to Bundy, "still regarded Cheddi Jagan as a danger."<sup>61</sup> During the discussions the President had stressed the US position that, "it is of fundamental importance not to have an independent British Guiana dominated by Jagan... and therefore we hope very much that the present schedule for elections in December will be kept firm."<sup>62</sup> Later, Secretary of State Rusk took up the same theme when he met with Walker stating that: "We would find it an intolerable situation to be confronted by an independent British Guiana with a Jagan-dominated

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<sup>59</sup> Cited in memorandum for the President from McGregor Bundy. NSF. 10/15-11/65. Vol. 1 of 3. Box 5. 1963-1969. Austin, Texas. LBJ Library.

<sup>60</sup> Documents on the discussions that took place are sanitised.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in 'Memorandum to the President' prepared by McGeorge Bundy. Oct. 26, 1964. NSC File. Country: UK. Folder: UK Walker Briefing Book, 10/26-27/64. Box 213. Texas. LBJ Library

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

government...”<sup>63</sup> Bundy had advised the President in his Memorandum that US Intelligence saw Jagan as a real danger.<sup>64</sup>

The US Administration sought to mobilise support to try to convince the British Government that an independent Guiana under Cheddi Jagan would not be acceptable to them. Therefore in preparation for talks with British Foreign Secretary Gordon Walker, Bundy advised that: “You do want to speak to him about British Guiana and about our belief that we will not put up with Cheddi Jagan at the head of a PPP Government.”<sup>65</sup>

The US Administration’s efforts prevailed and resulted in British Guiana passing from Cheddi Jagan’s leadership to that of Forbes Burnham as leader of an independent Guiana on 26 May 1966.

We turn next to economic cooperation.

### **3. Economic Cooperation**

In comparison with the period 1954-1960, when the British Government was directly in charge of British Guiana, the period 1961-1966 was one in which more authority was given to the government led by Cheddi Jagan from 1961-1964 and by Forbes Burnham from 1964-1966. This period also saw growing agitation for independence.

Economic cooperation between the US and UK during these two periods (1961-1964) and (1964-1966) saw US economic assistance to British Guiana increased dramatically from a very small amount to a more significant amount in the second period.

#### **a. 1961-1964**

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Memorandum to the President’ prepared by McGeorge Bundy. *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Bundy’s Memorandum to the President. Oct. 26, 1964. *Op. Cit.* in fn. 61.

During this period the US Administration accepted the British proposal to woo Cheddi Jagan with economic assistance, with the objective of preventing him from turning to the Eastern-Bloc countries. In this spirit the US Administration had agreed to aid the PPP Government but within the administration's budgetary limits. The US Administration had therefore approved an IBRD Fact-finding Mission in February-March 1961 to British Guiana and subsequently approved a loan for development in the colony. However, implementation of the agreement had been prevented as a result of the Bay of Pigs incident in April 1961 that involved the United States in its attempt to overthrow President Castro of Cuba. The Kennedy Administration put on hold all assistance to British Guiana when Cheddi Jagan hailed President Castro's victory. Cuba had become a very emotionally charged issue for the American public and the Congress. As John Hennings<sup>66</sup> said ...The State Department dare not appear soft on Cuba or on any who are popularly labelled 'Castroist.'<sup>67</sup> The State Department had other considerations to take into account when considering loans to Cheddi Jagan. There had been opposition from Congressmen of both the Republican and Democratic Parties.<sup>68</sup> To counter such opposition, there had been mobilisation by both the US Administration and the British Government to interest the Canadian Government in providing economic aid to Cheddi Jagan. Canada had large economic interests in the colony with Alcan being the largest shareholder in the bauxite and aluminum industries. The PPP Government's response to the economic assistance had been positive and it had even suggested a kind of 'Colombo Plan'

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<sup>66</sup> British Foreign Service Officer, UK Embassy, Washington. Memorandum to Ambler Thomas, Colonial Office. 25 April 1961. FO:371/161948; File: A347/110/2, 25 April, 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>67</sup> Schlesinger had explained US position to British Officials on aid to Jagan in March 1962 indicating that the American public mind had associated Jagan and Castro, hence the cautious approach of the Administration. Sir Ormsby Gore, Memorandum to British Foreign Office. March 18, 1962. #852. Doc: CO:1031/3646. File: A/345/03/62, 17 March 1962. London. PRO.

<sup>68</sup> Congressman-Republican; Congressman Rooney- Democrat from Brooklyn District, New York. Rooney was also Chairman of the House Appropriations Sub-Committee of the State Department and was also a close confidant of Peter D'Aguiar, who had opposed Cheddi Jagan's Government. John Jennings' Memorandum, 28 Feb. 1962, British Embassy, Washington D.C., to Thomas Ambler at Colonial Office. FO:371/161948; File: A347/03/62. 2 March 1962. London. PRO.

approach working closely with the US and Britain.<sup>69</sup> At the Anglo-American talks of September 1961, both Governments had agreed on an approach to aid Cheddi Jagan and the role that the Canadian Government could play in British Guiana's economic development.

The victory of the PPP on 21 August 1961 and the PPP's well publicised expectations of Western aid to British Guiana<sup>70</sup> put further pressure on both the British and US Governments to work out some sort of plan for British Guiana very soon thereafter. Despite its efforts to find a working solution with the PPP leader, the US Administration still did not have confidence in Cheddi Jagan's leadership. Nevertheless, US Ambassador Melby in Georgetown had asked President Kennedy to show friendship to Cheddi Jagan.<sup>71</sup> Arthur Schlesinger had also proposed to the President that the US should try and work with Cheddi Jagan,<sup>72</sup> for "...we have no real choice but to feel Jagan out and see what we can do to bring him into the western camp."<sup>73</sup> Schlesinger sought, "to tie Jagan to the political and economic framework of the hemisphere, while at the same time re-insuring against pro-Communist developments by building up anti-Communist clandestine capabilities."<sup>74</sup> But the US offer of G\$5 million against Cheddi Jagan's request of G\$60-250 million<sup>75</sup> at this time had created considerable strains between the US and the PPP and fears had been expressed within the US Administration that Cheddi Jagan could use this as a pretext to turn to the Soviet Bloc and thereby abandoning his professed desire to work with the West."<sup>76</sup> The British Government therefore urged the Kennedy Administration to provide economic assistance to the PPP Government if it wanted to bring about any kind of change in the colony. Heeding British advice,

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<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from Armstrong, Ottawa to US Secretary of State. #146, August 16, 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder: BG, General: 5/19/1961-8/23/61. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>70</sup> US Ambassador Melby, Georgetown. Memo of Aug. 23, 1961 to Secretary of State. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder: BG, General : 5/19/1961-8/23/61 Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Schlesinger's memo to The President on "British Guiana." Aug. 28. 1961. . Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder: BG, General : 5/19/1961-8/23/61. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>72</sup> Though he had shared the Department's feeling about British Guiana. Memorandum for the President on "British Guiana." Aug. 30, 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder: BG, General: 5/19/1961-8/23/61. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum for the President on "British Guiana." Aug. 30, 1961.... *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 72.

<sup>75</sup> US State Department internal Briefing Paper for Premier Jagan's Visit to USA in October 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder BG, General, 9/29/61-10/12/61. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>76</sup> DOS memorandum to AMCONSUL, Georgetown, #3, "Joint-ICA Message." Oct. 8, 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14. Folder BG: General 5/19/61-8/23/61. Boston. JFK Library.

by November 1961, the US Administration had decided to expand its technical assistance programme (then BWIS\$ 780,000) and to give 'modest help in economic assistance' but this proposal was not favourably received by Cheddi Jagan. In his economic development programme, Cheddi Jagan had planned for large-scale financing by the US Government. When this did not materialise, Jagan became suspicious of Western motives. The US Administration's hands were tied by public opinion which was against aiding a communist government. The alternative choice for the Administration was to call on the British Government to increase its financial contribution to the colony but as Parliamentary Under-Secretary Fraser said, Britain was unable to make available larger financial assistance to British Guiana because of its commitments to other colonial territories.<sup>77</sup>

The US Administration had asked the British for its assistance in the forthcoming talks with Cheddi Jagan in October 1961. This is seen in US Ambassador Bruce's reply to the US Secretary of State as follows: "During my talk with Lord Home today ... I mentioned British Guiana and our desire have him and FONOFF help us in viewing subject in forthcoming talks in its broadest context..."<sup>78</sup> Hence when Cheddi Jagan expressed his interest to visit the United States in his quest for economic aid, the Kennedy Administration seized upon this opportunity, though with a little 'push' by the British. In October 1961 Cheddi Jagan visited the USA and met President Kennedy and other State Department Officials. He also visited Canada, a member of the Commonwealth, which had been called upon to support the Western assistance programme and also since Alcan of Canada had the largest share of ownership in the bauxite industry.<sup>79</sup>

Cheddi Jagan had felt that despite all the promises and "good will" expressed by the US Administration to assist British Guiana, there was little or nothing substantial to show that the US

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<sup>77</sup> US Ambassador Bruce, memorandum to Secretary of State. #1669. Oct. 23, 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF. Countries. Box 14A. Folder BG, General, 9/29/61-10/12/61. Boston. JFK Library. The UK five-year development plan for BG was for aid to the extent of 23 million pounds. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had announced that overseas aid expenditure must not rise above the existing level.

<sup>78</sup> AMEMBASSY, London to Secretary of State. Sept. 2, 1961. # 947. US Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1667: 1960-1963. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>79</sup> CRO telegram to UK High Commissioner, Ottawa. # 1923. 8 Sept. 1961, FO/371/155721. File: 347/04./09;8 Sept. 1961. London. PRO.

Administration had honoured its commitments. This had put Cheddi Jagan in a difficult situation within his own Party and the Guianese people. He had promised them so much and had done very little by the time of the August 1961 elections. There were badly needed and long overdue improvements to be carried out in the colony but without outside financial assistance, there was very little that the PPP Government could have done. The US suspicions of Jagan's leftwing leanings had still not dissipated. In fact, they increased. Cheddi Jagan contributed to much of the doubts the US Administration held against him as he would sometimes describe himself as a communist. He expressed his deep admiration for Khrushchev and Castro.<sup>80</sup> In early 1962, just at the time when the US was considering loans for the colony, Cheddi Jagan sent young PPP members to Cuba for training, or requested from the British Government permission to recruit technical personnel from Soviet Bloc countries. Such actions or insensitivities would play a major role in any decision within the Department of State on aid to Cheddi Jagan.

By February 1962, the British were talking of the strains in relations with the US on the issue of aid and this led to a discussion between Lord Home and Dean Rusk in Geneva in March 1962.<sup>81</sup> Further talks between British<sup>82</sup> and US Officials<sup>83</sup> led to the US Administration sending William Burdett<sup>84</sup> to British Guiana for discussions with Governor Grey.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, the Report<sup>86</sup> offered no solutions to the problems in British Guiana. Nevertheless, in recognising the difficulties surrounding the question of aid to British Guiana under Cheddi Jagan and its own long

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<sup>80</sup> Cheddi Jagan's declaration before The Royal Commission of Enquiry, March 1962. See Senator Thomas Dodd's memorandum to Goodwin at DOS, July 9, 1962. US Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1668: 1960-1963. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>81</sup> See Memorandum for the President from Dean Rusk on "British Guiana." March 7 1962. US Decimal Files. RG 59. 1960-63. Box 1668. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>82</sup> The British Official was Hugh Fraser, Parliamentary British Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies.

<sup>83</sup> US Officials included Mr. Lucius D. Battle, Executive Secretary. "Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, The White House" on "British Guiana". US Decimal Files. RG 59. 1960-63. Box 1668. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>84</sup> White House Official.

<sup>85</sup> Lucius D. Battle's "Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, The White House" on "British Guiana". US Decimal Files. RG 59. 1960-63. Box: 1668. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>86</sup> Memorandum of Conversation "Social Gathering of Intellectuals," March 16, 1962. US Decimal Files. RG 59. 1960-63. Box 1668. Maryland. US National Archives.

term interests in the region as whole, the US Administration, shortly thereafter, approved an Economic Mission to British Guiana headed by Harry Hoffman which visited the colony in June 1962. The recent disturbances<sup>87</sup> in the Colony further imperiled British Guiana and increased the need for external economic assistance. In his Report, Hoffman suggested that “the easiest solution for the US would be to make a determination that Jagan is a communist---and then pull out entirely.”<sup>88</sup> The findings of the Report and Hoffmann’s comments and suggestions had coincided with the US Administration thinking on Cheddi Jagan’s communist leanings expressed by Hoffman as follows:

We have about reached the end of the line in trying to wean Jagan away from his Leftwing leanings through carefully guarded statements designed to give him hope that he might get development assistance...

There are many things – past statements, current leanings, people around him to which one may point to demonstrate that Jagan is, in fact, a communist and not just a socialist or a democratic Marxist. The simplest road to this conclusion is to say: ‘if it looks like a duck, waddles like a duck, quacks like a duck and associated with ducks – then it must certainly be a duck.’<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, in an interview with Cheddi Jagan with The Daily Gleaner on 5 January, 1962 he had declared himself to be a Socialist who believed in a planned economy.<sup>90</sup> He had also stated that he had only praises for the standard of living in the Soviet Union. Such declarations did not meet with any joy by the US Administration. Reuters reported on 4 March 1962 on the visit of members of the PPP namely; Janet Jagan and Brindley Benn to Soviet Bloc countries to solicit aid for British Guiana.<sup>91</sup> Such moves were of no comfort to President Kennedy. On March 8, 1962 the National Security Council undertook a review of the situation in British Guiana. It hoped at this time that the British Government could be persuaded to postpone the Independence Conference. In

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<sup>87</sup> There had been a seven-week strike in the sugar estates called by the PPP again seeking recognition of the PPP-dominated GAWU as the sole representative of sugar workers.

<sup>88</sup> Hoffman’s Report to the White House and DOS on “Economic Developments Mission to British Guiana.” President’s Office Files. “Commentaries.” Box 112A. (B.G.). Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>89</sup> Op. Cit., in fn. 88.

<sup>90</sup> Interview of Cheddi Jagan in the The Daily Gleaner “Socialist speaks. My point of view.” Friday, 5 January 1962. Papers of Arthur Schlesinger. File: General. 11/7/61 to 12/17/62. Box: WH 39. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>91</sup> Natural Resources Minister in 1962. London, Reuters Report. Papers of Arthur Schlesinger. File: General: 11/7/61 to 12/17/62. Box: WH 39. Boston. JFK Library.

any event President Kennedy decided to wait until after the talks between Lord Home, Secretary of State Rusk and Hugh Fraser of the Colonial Office.<sup>92</sup>

The US Administration was very reluctant to concede to the British on the issue of economic aid to British Guiana. As Hoffman put it, "Because of the political importance of economic assistance we should maintain maximum flexibility in the economic field."<sup>93</sup> In essence, what the Hoffman Report was indicating was that if Cheddi Jagan was serious about developing the country with Western aid, the US Administration would, "be prepared to move quickly into an adequate economic support program of at least G\$5-10 million annually."<sup>94</sup>

**b. 1964-1966**

Following the elections of 7 December 1964, held under Proportional Representation, the new electoral system, a coalition Government was formed by the PNC and the UF parties, Forbes Burnham became the Premier of British Guiana. The new Government was expected to begin immediately addressing the economic woes of the country. Since Britain could not provide adequate financial assistance to the new Government, Colonial Secretary Sandys had expressed the hope that the US Administration would be "pouring money into British Guiana, now that Burnham was in charge." The British Government, for its part, had allocated a portion in the region of G\$5 million from its Colonial Development Aid Programme.<sup>95</sup>

The "Annual Political-Economic Assessment" of British Guiana by American Consul Carlson in Georgetown, identified many areas that would call for immediate attention. As Consul Carlson stated in his Report, if the US Administration wished to have a genuine change of leadership in the colony, then it would have to give large amounts of economic assistance to the

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<sup>92</sup> President Kennedy's Memorandum to Dean Rusk, "National Security Action Memorandum," No. 135 March 8, 1962. Papers of President Kennedy. NSC. Folder: "Meetings and Memoranda." USAM # 135: British Guiana." Box 2335. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>93</sup> Hoffman's Report, "Action Program for British Guiana." July 20, 1962. Papers of President J.F. Kennedy. NSF. Box 15A. Countries. Folder: British Guiana. 6/62-12/62. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* The following two pages of this file have been removed from this folder, so it is not known what action the US Administration finally decided to take.

<sup>95</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between US and UK officials, London. Feb. 4, 1965 on "British Guiana." DOS Decimal Files RG: 69. Box: 1948. 1964-1966. Maryland. US National Archives.



'new' Government that would serve US long-term interest in the region at large.<sup>96</sup> To begin with immediately, the US Aid Programme to Guiana for the two years amounted to G\$17 million for housing projects, highway construction and repairs.

The success of the US Aid Programme in 1964, according the Consul Carlson, had led to the victory of the first "anti-Jagan parties." In US Administration thinking, its Aid Programme had put an end to the pro-communist Jagan regime.<sup>97</sup> Could the Administration continue aiding British Guiana on the same monetary scale in the future keeping in mind US objectives in Guiana and elsewhere? This question had been considered by the US Administration since 1964. In addressing this issue, The US Administration sought to interest other countries such as Japan, Canada and West Germany, to contribute to Guiana's future well being. It also began to encourage foreign investors and to encourage Guiana's Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, to try to play a role by making the rice industry efficient.<sup>98</sup>

By 1965, the Johnson Administration was keen to implement the recommendations of the Hoffman Economic Mission.<sup>99</sup> The seven-year programme (1963-1969), covering projects across-the-board, was projected to cost BWIS\$ 228 million with the US providing most of it and supplemented by contributions from the UK and Canadian Governments. The new Government of British Guiana had to begin to address the long awaited developments so as to demonstrate to the people that it represented change; that the hardships that they had endured for so long would be alleviated.

On 22 May 1966, the US Administration approved a loan of US\$ 34 million for industrial development in British Guiana and accorded Premier Burnham's government the generous

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<sup>96</sup> American Consul Carlson's Assessment Report of August 10, 1964. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1947:19664-1966. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>97</sup> Consul Carlson's "Annual Political-Economic Assessment - British Guiana." Sept. 17, 1965. DOS Decimal Files. RG 59. Box: 1947. 1964-1966. Maryland. US National Archives

<sup>98</sup> Consul Carlson's "Annual Political-Economic Assessment - British Guiana..." *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>99</sup> Hoffman Mission Report, "Economic Aid Program for British Guiana." 1962. Papers of President Kennedy. Box 15A. NSF: Countries. Folder: British Guiana. 6/62-12/62. Boston. JFK Library.

repayment time frame of 40 years.<sup>100</sup> On 25 May 1966, one day before the colony gained its independence from Britain, The Graphic expressed the relief of the people in announcing that US Officials in Washington foresaw a “substantial” aid programme for Guyana. In this package, it was reported, US\$2 million was earmarked for industrial development.<sup>101</sup> US support for an independent Guyana in 1966 and thereafter can be seen by its enthusiasm to provide economic aid to support the new PNC Government to enable it to begin addressing the deplorable economic conditions in the country which otherwise would have created many problems for both the Guyanese and US Administrations in the Cold War climate that continued after Guyana’s independence. US investors were soon on site. Mr. Irving Fain, a leading American industrialist called on the new Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, “expressing his desire to cooperate with Guyana on the establishment of a number of light industries.”<sup>102</sup> Further relief from the US Department of State was reconsideration of Guyana’s sugar quota to the US market.

Educational considerations went hand in hand with economic development. US education specialist, Dr. Williams, visited the country to consult with the Minister of Education, Mrs. Winifred Gaskin, on how to rebuild and improve the educational system. He indicated to the Minister that the US Administration offered her the possibility of recruiting qualified teachers from the US for the University of Guyana and the country’s schools.<sup>103</sup> The UK Government for its part offered a £10 million package for development purposes.<sup>104</sup>

We turn next to intelligence cooperation.

#### 4. Intelligence Cooperation

The literature on intelligence cooperation shows the broad outlines of cooperation between the intelligence services of the UK and the USA in dealing with perceived threats of communism in

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<sup>100</sup> Guiana Graphic. Wednesday 22 May 1966. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p.1.

<sup>101</sup> Guiana Graphic. 22 May 1966. “US Government Loan of US\$ 34 million for Industrial Development.” p. 1. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Guyana Graphic. Saturday, June 4, 1966, “US Investors call on Burnham.” p. 9. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives.

<sup>103</sup> Hoffmann’s Report to the White House and DOS on “Economic Developments Mission to British Guiana.” President’s Office Files. “Commentaries”. Box 112A. (B.G.). Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>104</sup> Guyana Graphic. June 5, 1966. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p.1.

particular areas. We shall first set out the broad pattern of such intelligence cooperation and then seek to present such evidence as could be detected of cooperation on British Guiana.

**a. Cooperation on intelligence generally**

It is a matter of public record that the intelligence services of the UK and the US have cooperated and shared information since the early 1900s on many aspects of mutual interest. British and American Security Services have a long history of cooperation going back to the Second World War. In 1946 a US Liaison Office was set up in London and schemes were devised for avoiding duplication of effort. It was agreed that materials would be exchanged between the two Agencies. In addition, an exchange programme was started under which personnel from each Agency would work 2 or 3 years at the other. In 1947 a UK-USA Agreement was concluded.<sup>105</sup> It provided for the division of Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) collecting responsibilities between the USA on the one hand and Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand on the other hand.<sup>106</sup> The specific Agencies then involved were the US National Security Agency, the Australian Defence Signals Directorate (DSD), the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the Canadian Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and the New Zealand Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB). Under the divisions of responsibilities, the USA was responsible for Latin America.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to specific SIGINT collection responsibilities, the Agreement also concerned access to collected intelligence and security arrangements for the handling of data. Cooperation between British and American security services in dealing with alleged communist threats during the Cold War are well documented. Challis has described how the British and the US governments cooperated in the 1960s to oust the democratically elected President Sukarno of Indonesia citing as reason that the President had posed a "communist threat" to the country.<sup>108</sup> Challis stated:

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<sup>105</sup> Also known as the UK/USA Security Agreement or the "Secret Treaty."

<sup>106</sup> USA/UK: "Joined at the HIP" Intelligence Cooperation." [http:// UK and USA Intelligence Cooperation.](http://UKandUSAIntelligenceCooperation)

<sup>107</sup> USA/ UK: " 'Joined at the HIP' Intelligence Cooperation." [http:// UK and USA Intelligence Cooperation.](http://UKandUSAIntelligenceCooperation)

<sup>108</sup> R. Challis. *Shadow of a Revolution. Indonesia and the Generals.* Gloucestershire, Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2001, p.x .

“...the CIA infiltrated the upper echelons of the Indonesian army, identified in the young Suharto an opportunist better disposed to meet American requirements and, in 1965, assisted him in executing a phased coup leading to the murder of more than one million supposed ‘communists.’ Britain, in seeking US support for its Greater Malaysian plan, co-operated wholeheartedly, deploying operational naval units, exploiting tribal resentments and setting up a sophisticated propaganda weapon which was one of the targets to link Sukarno with the communists and conceal the true extent of the bloodbath...”<sup>109</sup>

In the case of British Guiana, although direct evidence of cooperation between the Intelligence Services of the two countries is not easily available such cooperation can be deduced from their general cooperation. It is also implicit in the diplomatic correspondence. An example of this is to be found in a memorandum to the British from US Secretary of State Rusk dated 11 August 1961. In this memorandum, Rusk stated: “...yours and our information about Jagan seems to be much the same, as is to be expected from our close collaboration...”<sup>110</sup>

National Security Adviser Bundy explicitly referred to the energetic role of the US intelligence community. In one note Bundy states that “...our professionals are somewhat more hardnosed than the British and would like to see the British resume direct rule and throw Jagan out. Neither Rusk nor I feel as strongly as the intelligence people on this...”<sup>111</sup> To assess the situation and its implications of a third victory of Cheddi Jagan in August 1961, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) was carried out in March 1961 by the US Administration. Its task was to assess the situation in British Guiana and its implications for the US. The Report identified Mrs. Jagan as a communist and several other PPP leaders ‘who are believed to be Communists...’<sup>112</sup> The Report stated that: “while Cheddi Jagan himself is not an acknowledged Communist, his statements and actions over the years bear the marks of the indoctrination and advice the Communists have given him...” The Report further stated that the Jagans had established close ties with Cuba and

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>110</sup> Telegram from the Dept. of State to the AMEMBASSY, UK. Washington 11 August 1961. NSF, Country Series. May 19-Aug. 23'61. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>111</sup> Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy. NSF 10/15 – 11/65. Vol. 1 of 3. Box: 1963-69. LBJ Library.

<sup>112</sup> SNIE Assessment Report on “Prospects for British Guiana”, Washington, March 21, 1961. FO/371/155721; File: A/347/61, 21 March 1961. paras. 2 -3. London. PRO. See also *FRUS*, 1961-1963. vol. XII. pp. 514-515.

other communist leaders abroad. Jagan, it stated, had identified the PPP with Castro's cause.<sup>113</sup> The

Report concluded:

“We consider it more likely that an independent Jagan government would seek to portray itself as an instrument of reformist nationalism which would gradually move in the direction of Castro's Cuba. Such a regime would almost certainly be strongly encouraged and supported by Castro and the Bloc.”<sup>114</sup>

The Assessment gave cause for US concern about Jagan's victory in August 1961. The US Administration shared these concerns with the British Government and sought ways on how the two countries could address the issues, “with a view to arriving at a jointly agreed estimate...”<sup>115</sup>

Shortly after the inauguration of President Kennedy in late January 1961, his Special Assistant for National Security, wrote him a memorandum on 4 April 1961 drawing the President's attention to the danger of Cheddi Jagan and his PPP winning the general elections planned for British Guiana on 21 August 1961. Citing a senior official in the British Colonial Office, McGeorge Bundy stated that the British Government was secretly committed to granting full independence to British Guiana eight months after the West Indian Federation became independent. In that scenario British Guiana would be independent in 1963. Spelling out the implications of such a scenario, McGeorge Bundy told President Kennedy that both Cheddi Jagan and his wife had a long history of communist associations. Both had visited Cuba and expressed admiration for the Castro regime.

On 5 May 1961, a month after Bundy's memo was written the National Security Council (NSC), at the same meeting, adopted parallel decisions calling for the overthrow of Fidel Castro and the halting of communism in British Guiana. The subsequent diplomatic records, based on materials obtained at the Public Records Office and at the Kennedy and Johnson libraries, not only confirm UK-US cooperation on the fate of British Guiana but also bring out clearly the following points:

First, while the Conservative governments of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Prime Minister Sir Alex Douglas-Home favoured the granting of independence to British Guiana

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<sup>113</sup> The SNIE Report. *Op. Cit.*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>115</sup> Dept. of State Instructions to AMEMBASSY, London . # CA-March 25, 1961. US Decimal Files RG 59. Box: 1669: British Guiana, 1960-1963. Maryland. US National Archives.

around 1962, the American Government pressed and obtained that British Guiana would only be granted independence in circumstances and at a time that the Americans were comfortable with.

Second, the blueprint for British Guiana's independence, including its constitution and its electoral system, were subjects of intensive discussions at the highest level of both Governments. At one stage Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, wrote to his British counterpart, Lord Home, that it was "mandatory that we concert on remedial steps in British Guiana." Following their meeting at Birch Grove on 30 June 1963 where they reached an understanding on British Guiana, President Kennedy wrote to Prime Minister Macmillan on 11 July 1963, "Your understanding of this position at Birch Grove was heartening to me, and I think it is essential that we should continue to see eye to eye on this basic point. In my judgement, this is the heart of the matter...."<sup>116</sup>

At an NSC meeting of 5 May 1961, "US Policy Toward British Guiana." was the subject of discussion and it is clear that the US and UK Governments were working in close collaboration on how to address US concern about the establishment of a communist regime in that country. It was agreed at the meeting "that the Task Force on Cuba would consider what can be done in cooperation with the British to forestall a communist take-over in that country."<sup>117</sup> During the discussions, it was learned that the US and British Governments had been actively working on this issue for some weeks.

While the US Administration demonstrated profound concerns about the establishment of another communist state in the hemisphere, the British Intelligence community did not share those concerns. Britain did not delude itself that Cheddi Jagan would cut all ties with the communist countries, but it viewed him as the only person capable, among the others, to govern the country in

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<sup>116</sup> Message to Prime Minister Macmillan from President, July 11, 1963. President's Office Files. Countries: UK. Box: 127A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>117</sup> DOS Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF: Countries: Folder - BG, 5/19/61 - 8/23/61. General. Box: 14A. Boston. JFK Library.

the post-independence period. In 1961 British Intelligence recognised his leftwing leanings and stated that Cheddi Jagan would continue his association with Cuba and Soviet bloc countries. It had suggested "...the need to keep a vigilant eye on the possibility that they may use their communist contacts..."<sup>118</sup> The Report stated that the Jagan Government was likely to follow a "neutralist line", a policy which was similar then with small countries such as Ghana (Nkrumah) and even larger ones such as India.<sup>119</sup> The Report, however, did not 'tar' Cheddi Jagan with the Communist brush, but had cautioned that:

"...the greatest danger is likely to arise from the fact that Jagan is an unpractical idealist and his administration will show administrative incompetence and indecisiveness rather than from the ideology of himself and his friends. Too facile an identification of the PPP leaders as "Communists" and an undue preoccupation with Communism may make it difficult to view the B.G. problem in its true perspective. The election results and constitutional changes to be given an importance out of all proportion to the country's size and potential."<sup>120</sup>

To the British Government, Cheddi Jagan was, "a sincere and honest person, devoted ... to his country's good ..." <sup>121</sup> The assessment of Cheddi Jagan's post-independence position was that he would align the country with the West, citing as evidence Cheddi Jagan's initiatives to obtain assistance from Britain, the United States and Canada; his interest in associating an independent Guiana with hemispheric and Western Organisations/Institutions such as the Organisation of American States, the British Commonwealth, The West Indies Federation and The United Nations.<sup>122</sup>

In the midst of the political deadlock in British Guiana, the United States Information Services in Washington discussed its agenda with the Intelligence Office. A memorandum of October 3, 1963 detailed a three-page programme for introduction in the British colony. This programme focused on educating the people of the dangers of communism. USIS also proposed

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<sup>118</sup> Intelligence Brief Memorandum on "British Guiana – Political Situation." British Ministry of Defence. May 5, 1961. # J/53. FO/371/1557/22. File: 347/5/61. 6 May 1961. London. PRO.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Intelligence Brief Memorandum on British Guiana – Political Situation....." *Op. Cit.*, at fn. 118.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Intelligence Brief Memorandum in "British Guiana – Political Situation." *Op. Cit.*, in fn. 118.

upgrading and enlarging its office in Georgetown thereby to enable it to make its own decisions and to take actions which became important in the climate existing in the colony.<sup>123</sup> Such an operation could not have been undertaken without the approval of the British Government.

## 5. Trades Unions Cooperation

While the role of the Trades Unions is treated exclusively in a separate chapter in this study, we shall provide brief highlights of Anglo-American trade union co-operation on British Guiana during the period 1961-1966. This cooperation took the following forms: Financial Assistance, Training Courses and Visits.

### a. Financial Assistance

In 1961, the British Guiana Trades Union Council considered itself to be under attack from the PPP Government that wanted its own Union to be recognised as the legitimate representative of the sugar workers in the country. The British Guiana Trades Union Council (BGTUC) was then affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trades Union (ICFTU) and, in 1961 the President of the BGTUC, Richard Ishmael, sought the assistance of both the British and American Trades Union councils.<sup>124</sup> Ishmael held discussions with both George Woodcock, President of the British TUC and Burdett of The US Department Of State requesting assistance to defend the workers of British Guiana. Ishmael was assured of assistance from both American and British Unions. Dean Rusk discussed this issue further with Dawson, a Desk Officer at the Colonial Office and both Governments agreed to assist the British Guiana TUC. The British Guiana TUC, furthermore, sought aid from the AFL-CIO in order to strengthen the movement to fight against, what was regarded as a Jaganite communist threat."<sup>125</sup> The US Administration favoured strengthening free labour and had advised its Consul in Georgetown to seek assistance through the

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<sup>123</sup> White House Staff Donald M. Wilson, USIS Washington, Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, Oct. 3, 1963. Papers of President Kennedy. NSF, Country Folder: British Guiana, General Box: 15A. 9/63-11/93. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>124</sup> Ishmael was on his way home from attending a conference in Stuttgart, when he visited UK and Washington.

<sup>125</sup> Rusk Memorandum to AMCONSUL, Georgetown. 10 Oct 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. File: NSF. Countries: BG-General: 9/29/61-10/12/61. Ref. Copy. Box 14A. Boston. JFK Library.



international free trade union movement while The Department would 'urge AFL-CIO to stimulate such aid primarily through International Trade Secretariats (ITS)...'<sup>126</sup>

On 24 October, 1962, for example, Associate Inter-American Representative McLellan, wrote to Richard Ishmael:

As I wrote you in my last letter, the question of proportional representation has been discussed here in Washington with the proper authorities and I am sure this is one of the matters Brother Howard McCabe will discuss with you when he arrives in Georgetown soon.<sup>127</sup>

On 11 March 1964 McLellan wrote to his colleague Meakins in Georgetown:

"On Monday morning, Secretary-of-State Dean Rusk's Labour Adviser George P. Delaney called a meeting in his office to discuss the situation in British Guiana as it was being reported to the Department of State. Present were Mr. Melby, former Counsel (sic) General in British Guiana; Joseph Mintzes, Labour Adviser (Europe) for the Department of State; Arnold Zempel, Assistant to Mr Delaney; Howard McCabe, International Affairs Director of the PSI, Wally Legge, Inter-American Representative of the PTTI and myself. We discussed the entire situation and all of us participated in the actual discussion. We endeavoured to bring each other up to date on the daily news clippings we are individually receiving from BG."<sup>128</sup>

The AFL-CIO Inter-American representative Serafino Romualdi, maintained unrelenting opposition to Cheddi Jagan throughout the period covered in this study. The records of the Kennedy years show him compiling and submitting memoranda such as "Facts on Cheddi Jagan and His Communist controlled Peoples' Progressive Party of British Guiana". In a supplementary note dated 17 September 1962, which he submitted to President Kennedy's Aide, Arthur Schlesinger, he quotes extensively from the official excerpts of the Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry following the strikes. The memorandum noted the questioning of Cheddi Jagan by Luckhoo and Cheddi Jagan's admission that he was a communist.

During the 80-day strike in early 1963, there had been severe food shortages in British Guiana. In May 1963, Andrew McLellan, AFL-CIO Latin American Representative, visited Port-

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<sup>126</sup> DOS Memorandum to AMCONSUL, Georgetown. 10 Oct 1961. Papers of President Kennedy. File: NSF. Countries: BG-General: 9/29/61-10/12/61. Ref. Copy. Box 14A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>127</sup> McLellan's letter to Richard Ishmael, 24 October 1962. International Affairs Department. Country Files: 1945-1971. Box 16/15. British Guiana Files, 1962. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>128</sup> McLellan's letter of 11 March 1964 to G. Meakins. Box 017/01, 1945-71. File: Caribbean Area, British Guiana, 1964. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

of-Spain to arrange with the trades unions there to send food to British Guiana Trades Unions members.<sup>129</sup> Such efforts were carried out with the cooperation of the Colonial Office and the BTUC. As the strike prolonged, on 6 June 1963, the British TUC General Secretary Woodcock sent Willis, General Secretary of London's typographical society, to give union members both moral and technical assistance.<sup>130</sup> George Meany of AFL-CIO wrote to Ishmael, giving both moral and financial support to him.<sup>131</sup>

In 1965, American Consul Carlson in his Report advocating continued financial support, drew the US Department's attention to the need for its continued support to the MPCA and the TUC.<sup>132</sup> He went so far as to suggest that consideration should be given to the setting up of a credit union for MPCA members to enable it to function more effectively and thus giving it a much needed advantage over the rival unrecognised Guiana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) which had been seen to be under the influence of Cheddi Jagan.

As we have seen in an earlier chapter Philip Agee, in Inside the Company – the CIA, claimed that CIA-instigated violence gave the British Government the pretext to call in its army to restore law and order in the colony.<sup>133</sup> Besides its covert operations, the US overtly hailed the British decision as a victory in preventing the establishment of a communist beach-head on the mainland of South America. They also aided the British Government through their diplomatic channels to ensure that the latter's decision was well received in the Caribbean.

Neil Sheenan writing in the New York Times, on 21 February 1967, reported on how the CIA-financed American labour unions, the American Federation of States, County and Municipal Employees Union (AFSCME), channeled money through the London-based Public Service

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<sup>129</sup> Secretary of State Rusk's Memorandum to AMCONSUL, Georgetown. May 28, 1963. Papers of President Kennedy. File: NSF. Countries: BG-General: 5/63-6/63. Ref. Copy. Box 15A. Boston, JFK Library.

<sup>130</sup> American Consul Bruce, London, to Secretary of State Rusk. June 27, 1963. #5343. Papers of President Kennedy. File: NSF. Countries: BG-General: 5/63-6/63. Ref. Copy. Box 15A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>131</sup> Summary of Senator Fulbright's TV statement to US Official, Alexis Johnson, AMEMBASSY, London. 28 July 1963. Papers of President Kennedy. File: NSF. Countries: BG-General: 5/63-6/63. Ref. Copy. Box 14A. Boston. JFK Library.

<sup>132</sup> American Consul Carlson's Report, "Annual Political-Economic Assessment – British Guiana," Sept. 17, 1965 to DOS. US Decimal Files. RG 59. Box 1947. British Guiana. 1964-1966. Maryland. US National Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Philip Agee, "Inside The Company – the CIA." Brochure, c. 1970.

International (PSI). According to his story, the CIA also financed the American Institute of Free Labour Development (AFILD), which provided ORIT with resources to train local citizens in the operation of free economies at their centres in Latin America, the Caribbean and the USA. The main aim of the AFILD, he reported, was to create a docile subservient trade union movement.<sup>134</sup>

Evidence of the American Government cooperation with labour at the highest levels, according to Meisler, is found in the words of John Kennedy to the AFL-CIO convention in the fall of 1963:

I want to express my appreciation for the actions which this organization has taken under the leadership of Mr. Meany, both at home and abroad, to strengthen the United States, to make it possible in this hemisphere for labor organisations to be organized so that wealth can be more fairly distributed.<sup>135</sup>

Kennedy's successor, President Johnson, in a letter to Assistant Secretary of State Thomas C. Mann, noted "I want you to work closely with private United States groups and institutions carrying out activities in Latin America." Among the groups he listed, "[t]he AFL-CIO topped the list."<sup>136</sup> It is generally understood that the term Latin America encompassed non-Spanish speaking areas of the South American continent.

**b. The AFL-CIO Raised Funds in the United States of America for the Anti-communist Fight in British Guiana.**

A letter of 31 October 1963 contains intriguing reference to information being shared with those who had provided financing in support of anti-communist strike action in British Guiana. McLellan in that letter referred to anonymous funders who were kept informed of developments on behalf of free trade unions in British Guiana.<sup>137</sup>

**c. Training Courses**

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<sup>134</sup> N. Sheenan, "CIA Link to Strikes that helped oust Jagan," New York Times. 21 Feb. 1967.

<sup>135</sup> S. Meisler. "Dubious Role of AFL-CIO Meddling in Latin America." Labour Bulletin. 10 Feb, 1964. London. PRO.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid..

<sup>137</sup> Overseas Department, Ministry of Labour. Aid to Trade Unions. September 1963. Confidential paper prepared for TUC, OEF and HMG meeting of October, 1963. Marjorie Nicholson papers. File: 973. London. BTUC Library.

It is a well-known fact that part of the AFL-CIO strategy for supporting local trade unions in British Guiana was to provide training in the USA. This was done very strategically. A case in point was that of Mr B.J.H. Nichols, Chairman of the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union, who was involved during the height of trade union actions against the PPP Administration. On 13 May 1964, during the anti-PPP campaign, Gerard P. O'Keefe, Director, Department of International and Foreign Affairs, wrote to Mr Frederick A. Colwell, Chief, Special Exchanges Branch in the Department of State's Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs:

I have had considerable contact with Mr Bert J. H. Nichols, President of the Commercial and Clerical Workers Union of British Guiana, and he has impressed me as a trade union leader who would benefit greatly from participating in a course similar to that offered at Harvard University.... I sincerely request that favourable consideration be given to the application of Mr Bert Nichols for participation in the Harvard Trade Union Program for the fall 1964 course.<sup>138</sup>

The approach succeeded and Nichol eventually left for the USA to be trained.

Another example of the method at work may be seen in a letter dated 6 April 1962 from Serafino Romualdi to Andrew L. Jackson, President of the Federation of Unions of Government Employees (FUGE). In dealing with the issue of proportional representation for Guyana, which the AFL-CIO was working for, Romualdi wrote:

Please give to our friends the enclosed material. I understand that Israel does not yet have a Constitution; the only reference to a system of proportional representation is contained on page 28. I expect to meet with Doherty pretty soon and we will then agree about the future visit of our friends to the United States.

Romualdi wrote in the same letter:

I now plead with you to send me without delay the name of your candidate for the school, American Institute for Free Labour Development, and all the other information required.<sup>139</sup>

Political strategy and trade unionism thus went hand in hand.

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<sup>138</sup> Gerard O'Keefe's letter of 13 May 1964 to Frederick Colwell. Series: Caribbean Area: British Guiana, 1963-64. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>139</sup> Romualdi's letter of 6 April 1962 to Andrew Jackson, British Guiana. Series: International Affairs Dept. Country Files 1945-1971. British Guiana - 1962. Maryland. George Meany Memorial Archives

#### d. Visits of UK and US Trade Unionists to British Guiana

The British and American Trades Unions continued to follow the situation in British Guiana and to send representatives to the colony to look at the situation at first hand. They continued to receive representations from local trades unions that free trades unions were under threat in the colony. The PPP victory again in 1961 increased the fears of the MPCA in British Guiana. Richard Ishmael, President of the MPCA, expressed his fears for the future of British Guiana Trades Union Movement to the British TUC delegation that was visiting British Guiana at that time. Ishmael warned the British TUC that if British Guiana was granted independence, Cheddi Jagan had seemed likely to attempt to establish a communist regime similar to the regime in Cuba. If such a situation should arise, he knew that the Trades Union Movement would cease to exist.

The actions taken by the newly elected Government, which included the suspension of the convertibility of the local currency even into sterling, increases in taxes and the imposition of compulsory saving schemes, which the masses of workers could not afford, gave rise to fears and insecurity.

The problems of 1961 were expressed in Ormond Dice's Report of 2 May 1961.<sup>140</sup> Ormond Dice, Secretary and Treasurer of the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) located in Trinidad, was sent to British Guiana to assess the situation. The Report described the atmosphere in British Guiana as being very tense, which resulted from racial tensions in the country. Another notable observation was the MPCA concerns for the future of a free trade union movement in British Guiana, in the event of a PPP victory. While in British Guiana, Ormond Dice attended the BGTUC meetings, lectured at three Trades Union Seminars on the work of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and how it functioned. The British TUC subsequently communicated the situation prevailing in British Guiana to the ICTFU in Brussels.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> O. Dyce, "Report on Situation in British Guiana," 2 May 1961. File 9728. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>141</sup> Letter of 15 June 1961 from the General Secretary, British TUC to Mr. O. Bacu, General Secretary of ICFTU, Brussels. File: 875.3. London. BTUC Library.

Developments in the colony generally contributed to anxiety in some quarters and gave rise to fears about Cheddi Jagan's motives. The Government did not announce its plans for the future of the country. There were unsettled claims of Public Service employees with the Government and the public dis-satisfaction with the Government's Budget proposals, all culminated with the outbreak of disturbances again in the country. On this occasion Messrs. Burnham and D'Aguiar, joined in the demonstration against the Government. The Government was unable to control the situation and Governor Savage had to request for re-enforcements stationed in Jamaica.<sup>142</sup>

## 6. Cooperation in International Organisations

Further evidence of cooperation could be seen in: The Special Committee on Decolonisation; The Fourth Committee and The Organisation of American States (OAS).

It may be noted that historically the US was in favour of independence for the Colonies. However, in 1960 the United States joined eight other Western countries in abstaining on a Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The third world countries that drafted the declaration and discussed its importance in the General Assembly constantly referred to the Bandung conference and the spirit of Afro-Asian cooperation that called for the eradication of colonialism, which the Third World considered to be the greatest threat to international security.<sup>143</sup>

### a. The Special Committee on Decolonisation

The Special Committee was appointed on 27 November 1961.<sup>144</sup> Its first review of British Guiana was carried out in mid-1962 following a recommendation of the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. It began by reviewing the colonial history of British Guiana since 1814 tracing the social, political and economic development of the territory since the United Kingdom became the Administering Power.

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<sup>142</sup> Meeting of the Colonial Advisory Committee (CAC) of the TUC, 26 Feb. '62. File 972.8. London. BTUC Library.

<sup>143</sup> D. D. Newsom, *The Imperial Mantle. The United States, Decolonisation and the Third World*. Indiana, Indiana UP, 2001. p. 179.

<sup>144</sup> This Committee was established by General Assembly Resolution 1654 (XVI), 1961.

On 20 July 1962, the Committee, on the recommendation of the Sub-Committee on Petitions began hearings concerning British Guiana. Several members of the PPP Government pleaded their case for independence. The PPP representatives told the Committee that the British Government was ignoring the Guianese peoples' desire for independence and that the British Government was using delaying tactics such as the February 1962 riots in the colony as reasons for the postponement of the Constitutional Conference. Cheddi Jagan told the Committee that the deplorable conditions in the colony were due to British policy of granting limited development aid. Cheddi Jagan spoke of exploitation by foreign companies. He then called on the United Nations to take action to help reverse the deterioration in British Guiana and to propose actions that the colonial power must take to move the colony toward independence. In its defence, the British Government stated that the difficulties the colony were experiencing were due to the riots which broke out and which were caused by the PPP Government. By such actions, the British Government stated, the PPP Government showed that it was incapable of governing and that Governor Ralph Grey had declared a state of emergency. In March, a Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry was appointed to look into the causes of the problems in the colony. Support for independence for the PPP Government came from the Soviet Union and a few Latin American countries.<sup>145</sup> They called on the Committee to take action to assist British Guiana to gain its independence no later than 1962. The Soviet Union criticised the UK and US monopoly exploitation in British Guiana and for instigating disorder in the colony.<sup>146</sup>

By early March 1963, the political situation in British Guiana became polarised and tension increased further by the sugar strike called by the British Guiana Trade Union Council (BGTUC) in April 1963. On 10 May the Government declared a state of emergency in the colony.

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<sup>145</sup> Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Section C. Item 26. Doc. # A/5238. New York. United Nations Archives. p. 350.

<sup>146</sup> Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. GA 18th session, 16 July 1963. A/5445. New York. United Nations Archives. p. 231.

In October 1963, the Committee was again seized with the discussions on British Guiana's independence. Members from both the PPP and the PNC petitioned the General Assembly to take action. After the participants had been unable to agree on a solution, the Special Committee established a Sub-Committee to examine the situation in British Guiana.<sup>147</sup> Hearings were held in London after the British Government refused permission for any investigative action to be carried out in British Guiana.<sup>148</sup> At the hearings both Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham, and others, presented their positions supporting independence and under what terms. The differences between the two Parties were of such a nature that the Sub-Committee had concluded that it was unable to mediate between the two leaders. Cheddi Jagan's attitude while being considered severe, showed his willingness to compromise with the Opposition leader, Forbes Burnham, but the latter showed little or no willingness to compromise. In the end, the Sub-Committee reported, that the parties were unable to reach an agreement.

The Sub-Committee, in expressing its regret at the failure of the two Leaders to reach an agreement, proceeded to make two recommendations: (i) that the UN Secretary General convene a team of Constitutional experts drawn from Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries; and (ii) that the Special Committee invite the Government of the United Kingdom to do its utmost so that British Guiana should achieve independence as soon as possible<sup>149</sup> A year later, with the impasse on a solution still looming, the Special Committee had reviewed the subject of British Guiana. In a Resolution of 23 June 1964, the Sub-Committee expressed its distress at the grave and tragic situation prevailing in the colony of British Guiana. The Committee felt that the delay in

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<sup>147</sup> The Sub-Committee consisted of representatives of Mali, Syria, Chile, Iran and Sierra Leone. Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. New York. United Nations Archives. p. 247.

<sup>148</sup> The British Government had informed the Special Committee that it could not share its responsibilities with the United Nations on British Guiana or any other territory and that it could not agree to any visits to United Kingdom territories by any body representing the Committee. *The United Nations Yearbook 1963*. New York. United Nations Archives. p. 303.

<sup>149</sup> General Assembly Report, Agenda item 23. Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. 16 July 1963. doc. A/5447. 18th Session. New York. United Nations Archives.



granting independence to the colony was the main cause for that situation. It therefore called on the United Kingdom to fix, without delay, the date for the independence of British Guiana. It called on the political leaders to take steps to restore peaceful conditions and had requested the administering power to bring an end to the state of emergency.<sup>150</sup>

Developments regarding independence was moving in a positive direction for the US Government. Their objective in removing Cheddi Jagan from power in the colony was achieved when, at the December 1964 elections, under Proportional Representation, a coalition Government of the PNC and the UF Parties was formed. Forbes Burnham was named the Premier. At the Special Committee meeting in September 1965, Mr. Cummings, representative of the PPP, made a last stance presenting his Party's objection to British action, calling the Guiana Government illegal and accused the United States of interfering in the internal affairs of the colony.<sup>151</sup> Such protestations no longer had any effect on the political process in British Guiana. The British Government showed its willingness to now take the final steps to grant the colony its independence which was put into effect on 26 May 1966.

#### **b. The Fourth Committee of the General Assembly**

The PPP Government, having won the General elections of December 1961, and realising that the British Government, backed by the US Administration, was 'dragging its feet' on discussions about independence, began mobilising for the next stage of setting a date for the granting of independence. On 18 and 19 December 1961, Cheddi Jagan addressed the Fourth Committee<sup>152</sup> in support of a joint draft resolution submitted by fourteen Third World

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<sup>150</sup> "Declaration on Independence for Colonial Countries and Peoples." *United Nations Yearbook 1965*: British Guiana. New York, United Nations Archives. p. 567.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> The British Government, represented by Mr. Foot at the meeting, had objected to Cheddi Jagan as petitioner. He stated that this was unprecedented and had raised a major matter of principle. However, following discussions within the Committee, Cheddi Jagan was allowed to present his position. Telegram from UK Delegation to Secretary of State for the Colonies. Brief # 170. 19 December 1961. Doc: FO/371/155726. A342/09, 10 Dec. 1961. London. PRO.

countries.<sup>153</sup> The aim of the resolution was to mobilise member states at the United Nations to urge Britain to resume negotiations immediately with the British Guiana Government with a view to reaching an agreement on the date for independence for British Guiana and at the earliest possible date. The British Government's response had been swift. A representative of the British Government informed the Committee on 22 February 1962 that his Government had informed Cheddi Jagan that it was willing to hold a constitutional conference in May 1962 to discuss the arrangements in order to bring the colony to independence.<sup>154</sup>

### c. The Organisation of American States

Anti-communism was the principal feature of Dulles's policy toward Latin America. Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he stated, "I have a feeling that conditions in Latin America are somewhat comparable to conditions as they were in China in the mid-30s when the Communist movement was getting started..."<sup>155</sup> As the Cold War intensified, successive US Governments would use this institution to garner Latin American support for its policies, even in contravention to the latter's views, to combat communism in the region. The rise of Castro in Cuba and Castro's pronouncements and actions which indicated a close relationship with Moscow, the OAS became the instrument through which the US Administration fought to prevent communist entrenchment in the hemisphere.

The US Administration convened several conferences of the OAS since 1951 constantly reviewing the possible communist activities in the region with a view to containing them. In 1953, at the initiative of the US Administration, a Conference was convened, to meet what was termed "a

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<sup>153</sup> Cuba, Ghana, Guinea, India, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Republic and Yugoslavia. Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Seventeenth Session, Agenda Item 22. A/5238. New York. United Nations Archives. p. 349.

<sup>154</sup> "Consideration of the Question of British Guiana by the General Assembly at its Sixteenth Session." Report of the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Seventeenth Session, Agenda Item 23. A/5238. New York, United Nations Archives.

<sup>155</sup> "Latin America and Communism." (i) The Extent of Communist Infiltration. *Survey of International Affairs*, 1953. pp. 368-404.

communist threat” in Guatemala where a nationalist leader had been seeking to implement reforms and which would have impacted severely on US interests in the country.

At its Rio de Janeiro Conference in November 1954, colonialism had been discussed. Chile had proposed that the European Powers should place under United Nations trusteeship those colonies that were not yet ready for self-government, to which the US strongly opposed.<sup>156</sup> While the US had assured the participants that it supported the principle of self-determination, it pressed the point that it would not be appropriate to undertake such determination to continue giving assistance to any subversive activities in the hemisphere.

The Soviet Press had been very critical of the US handling of the Conference. It claimed that the US Administration had manipulated the participants to cooperate with it to isolate discussion since the European countries concerned were not represented at the Conference. Nevertheless, a resolution<sup>157</sup> condemning colonialism was passed at this Conference, with the US abstaining. The subject of communism gaining control in LA, with specific reference to British Guiana, had been raised, however, no discussion took place.

In 1964, at the height of the Cold War, the United States had been very active trying to keep Latin America and the Caribbean countries under control. Given its unhappy relations with Cuba, which was supported by the Soviet Union, the US Administration took measures to try and isolate Cuba. At a Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the American Republics on 26 July 1964, the members of the Organisation of American States (OAS) successfully adopted a resolution aimed at isolating Cuba within the hemisphere.<sup>158</sup> The US Administration’s aim was to cripple Castro’s ability to carry out subversive activities in other American Republics. The US Administration stated that Cuban Embassies in some American Republics had been providing considerable assistance for

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<sup>156</sup> The US delegate stated that the issue of “colonialism” could not be discussed then since the European Powers concerned were not represented at the conference. “Latin America and Communism.” (i) The Extent of Communist Infiltration. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-404.

<sup>157</sup> Sponsored by Argentina. Latin America and Communism.” (i) The Extent of Communist Infiltration. *Ibid.*, pp. 368-404.

<sup>158</sup> Memorandum for NATO Briefing.: “Preliminary Comments on Resolution on Cuba Adopted by Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the American Republics,” July 26, 1964.” File: FO/371/173575. File: A/347/08; 28 July 1964. London.PRO.

transmission of funds and propaganda, recruiting of agents and interference in the domestic affairs of such countries.<sup>159</sup> By taking such a stance against Cuba, the Johnson Administration hoped that it could help the US to deal with the Soviet Union from a position of strength. Fidel Castro, for his part, openly proclaimed his Marxist ideology and determination to continue giving assistance to any subversive activities in the hemisphere. The Soviet Press had been very critical of the US handling of the Conference. It claimed that the US Administration had manipulated the participants to cooperate with it to isolate Cuba.<sup>160</sup>

In British Guiana in 1964, Cheddi Jagan was still pursuing his radical policy of showering praises on Fidel Castro. It was reported that Cheddi Jagan had sent a number of Guianese to Cuba for training.

## **7. Civil Society: the Churches**

As in practically all situations where “communism” was being fought there was significant civil society activity, particularly involving the churches. The use of the church in the fight against communism is well documented. In this section we shall look at whether there was any evidence of cooperation among the British, American and Local Churches.

In British Guiana there is first hand evidence of the use of church personnel by MI6. Father Morrison, a Jesuit Priest, in a recent book, told the following story about how MI6 tried to recruit him in 1963.<sup>161</sup> Father Morrison stated that in 1960 when he had been appointed Diocesan Director of Youth Work he had organised a number of leadership seminars for the youths. It was at one of these seminars that the young people had demanded the formation of a new organisation to combat the growing influence of the Communist youth that was seen as a threat to the Church and the society. This new organisation thereafter became known as the “Green Light Organisation” (GLO).

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Soviet Press Articles .

<sup>161</sup> Fr. Andrew Morison. *Justice: The Struggle For Democracy in Guyana 1952-1992*. Georgetown: Red Thread Women's Press, 1993. Chap. 4.

The objective of the group had been to try and influence the youths of the country, as they said, “to win the world for Christ.”<sup>162</sup>

In 1963, the PPP Government had been facing a nationwide strike which lasted for 80 days. Father Morrison stated that it was during this period that he was invited by the Jesuit Superior in Britain to go to London: “to discuss the Communist threat with some British Officials...” Upon his arrival, he said that he was introduced to MI6 officials. Following this meeting he underwent a two-week session with this Organisation explaining to them the seriousness of the threat to British Guiana. He was then briefed on the workings of the Intelligence Organisation.

He stated that he was put up in the posh Griffin Hotel and his stay was sponsored by his tutors. Father Morrison explained that at his briefings he was taught all the techniques of espionage ranging from learning how to use video and other equipments, the methods to use in the exchange of messages with others – by transmission or by making “drops”; tactics to divert attention from one’s self, how to recognise others – the type of clothes one wore, or the colour of the hat; never to mention the real names of people.<sup>163</sup>

Father Morrison stated that toward the end of the session his host raised the subject of setting up a clandestine wireless communication system in the bush of British Guiana. He stated that he told his host that while he understood the Cold War struggles, he could not permit himself and his youth organisation to take part in such activities.<sup>164</sup>

Earlier, the Church had taken a particular interest in fighting communism in British Guiana. We have been able to trace the actual minutes of a Church Group, the “Sword of the Spirit” which, as far back as 1943, had organised to face the communist threat in British Guiana. The minutes of this Organisation, written in long hand show that the Catholic Church had an organised educational programme based on Christian values. The Organisation had placed a strong emphasis on religious education especially to the young who they viewed as the forebearers of the Christian church.

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Fr. Andrew Morison. *Justice: The Struggle For Democracy in Guyana 1952-1992*. Op. Cit.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

The Catholic Standard, the official arm of the Catholic Church, reported on the support of the various Church denominations in British Guiana in their fight against what they had perceived as a communist threat by the PPP Government. On 10 January 1961, the PPP Government had passed a Bill in the Legislative Council to take over the 51 Denominational Schools in British Guiana. This act had infuriated the Church Body. The Church Body had regarded the PPP Government's actions as a manifestation of Communism.<sup>165</sup>

In a memorandum from Governor Ralph Grey to the Colonial Office, he commented on his meeting with the heads of the various churches, the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, the British Guiana Congregational Union<sup>166</sup> during the seven-week strike in British Guiana in 1961. He stated that it was the first time that the leaders of the various denominational churches had spoken with one voice condemning the PPP Government as communist and came out in the defence of religious education in the schools in British Guiana.

In 1962, another General Strike gripped the country about which the Church had voiced its opinion. The Church viewed this strike as a protest by the Unions against what they considered an attempt by the Government to destroy the free union movement in British Guiana. It stated:

“...The evil consequences of a General Strike are so serious that the action of the Trade Unions can be justified only if this is the sole method left to them to defend their rights...”

“It is the considered opinion of this paper that this is a JUST STRIKE.”

In defence of religious education of children, there was a show of strength among the various Christian denominations at the Bourda Green Rally held on 15 January 1961. The various church denominations, appearing together for the first time on a public platform, attacked the

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<sup>165</sup> Governor Grey's memorandum, 15 Feb 1961 to Foreign Office. FO/371/155720. File: A/347/15, 15 Feb.1961. London. PRO

<sup>166</sup> Catholic Standard, #2. Friday, January 27, 1961. Georgetown. Guyana National Archives. p. 1.

Government and charged it with Communism. Prayers had been offered in the churches throughout the country against a godless Government.<sup>167</sup>

The Archbishop of the West Indies, Dr. Alan Knight (Anglican) who was Chairman of British Guiana's Christian Social Council had declared at the Bourda Green rally that the government should make a patriotic appeal to help solve the problems by providing more schools for the growing number of children then estimated at twenty thousand.<sup>168</sup> His message was that "togetherness would bring the people of British Guiana together in a common task." His message, he stated, had three objectives: "to witness to the right and necessity of religious education; to stress the need for partnership between the Government and the Demonstrators in educating our children for nationhood; and to protest against the Government's plan to take over 51 denominational schools."<sup>169</sup>

In 1961 Pope John XXIII had spoken on the restrictions imposed by the PPP Government on religious education in British Guiana. He said: "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says: Parents have a right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children..."<sup>170</sup>

Cheddi Jagan has written about the Churches' opposition to his policy with respect to the control of schools.<sup>171</sup> He has attributed the Churches's role in British Guiana as being in support of the wealthy and ruling groups.

## 8. Conclusion

From the materials we have examined in this chapter we have seen that Cheddi Jagan was considered by the British to have been a well-meaning nationalist given to extravagant statements occasionally. Nevertheless, the British Government thought it could work with him and that he was the best man to lead the country to independence. The American Government, however, at the

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<sup>167</sup> The Catholic Standard, #2. Op. Cit., in fn. 166.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid..

<sup>169</sup> Ibid..

<sup>170</sup> The Catholic Standard, #2. Op. Cit..

<sup>171</sup> C. Jagan, *The West on Trial. the Fight for Guyana's Freedom*. Dresden: Seven Seas. 1972. pp. 113-114.

height of the Cold War, and faced with the situation in Cuba, was determined not to suffer a second defeat in the struggle against communism. In the words of McGeorge Bundy, "the US would have to get rid of Cheddi Jagan by hook or by crook."<sup>172</sup>

The materials examined show diplomatic cooperation of a concentrated nature. There is solid evidence about the Kennedy-Macmillan Understanding and the UK-US Working Party. In the area of Economic Cooperation, there is evidence which brings out one point clearly: while the UK pressed the US for economic assistance to the country the latter held off until the arrival of the Burnham Government in December 1964.

As regards intelligence cooperation, there is enough evidence to show that this took place but how it actually occurred is, understandably, difficult to document. The materials have not been declassified or, in the case of the CIA, have been destroyed. Within International Organisations such as the United Nations, the UK and the US certainly concerted their efforts, particularly in the Special Committee on Decolonisation.

There is no doubt that both British and American Trade Unions were active in working against communism in British Guiana, however, the materials do not shed light on how they might have cooperated.

Finally, as regards Civil Society, there is good evidence that the Anglican and Catholic churches in the country were struggling against communism. There is also evidence that the British MI6 sought to use local church leaders. However, there is little evidence on how British and American churches might have cooperated in the struggle against communism in British Guiana.

At the end of this chapter we need to note that during the period covered there were costly strikes and racial violence fomented by foreign operatives mainly from the US. Numerous people were killed or wounded, buildings bombed, buildings destroyed by fire, and major hardships experienced by the population. The direct cause of this situation was the determination of the Americans, supported by the British, to stop Dr. Jagan from leading British Guiana into

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<sup>172</sup> Cited in 'Memorandum to the President.' Prepared by McGeorge Bundy. Oct. 26, 1964. NSC File. Country: UK



independence. It would be fair to say however, if one leaves aside the broader East-West struggle, there is little evidence of an international communist conspiracy in British Guiana. The British were never convinced of this and acted largely under American pressure. The American themselves were moved by two considerations: 1) to avoid another embarrassment to President Kennedy; and 2) to make sure that the Democrats were not embarrassed in the 1964 Presidential elections. The people of British Guiana paid a heavy price to avoid embarrassment to the Democratic Administration.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **POST INDEPENDENT GUYANA**

## **1. Introduction**

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, ever since 1953 British Guiana, and later independent Guyana from 1966, had encountered major political, economic and social difficulties. This could be attributed to the following causes: (i) The circumstances leading up to the suspension of the constitution in 1953. (ii) The uncertainties of the period 1953 to 1961. (iii) The race riots of the period 1962-1963. (iv) The introduction of proportional representation in 1964 which continues to divide the country ethnically. (v) The rigging of the elections between 1968 and 1992, (vi) Political and economic corruption between 1964 and 1992, (vii) Anglo-American support for the PNC Government between 1964 and 1982 and political corruption between 1992 and 2000. and (viii) The demographic structure of the country which has produced indo-Guyanese majorities in the elections of 1992, 1997 and 2001.

In this chapter we shall look at Anglo-American support for the corrupt PNC Government between 1966, the year of independence and 1992, which saw the first free elections following the end of the Cold War. We look briefly at US support for the non-democratic regime in Guyana between 1968 and 1989 and then present briefly the political situation as it evolved between 1992 and 2002.

## **2. US Support for a Non-Democratic Regime in Guyana, 1968-1989**

Following Guyana's independence in 1966, the Government's control of the country under the Presidency of Forbes Burnham from 1968 onwards could not, under any circumstances, be described as democratic. The US Administration had orchestrated the ouster of the professed Marxist-Leninist leader, Cheddi Jagan, from power in 1964. Despite the PNC's 'illegal' activities under Guyana's constitution, the US backed the government from 1968 to 1989. The PNC's 'illegal' activities were manifested in the manipulation of the elections from 1968 to 1989. US continued economic aid enabled the government to survive.

### a. Rigged elections 1968-1989

It has been documented by impartial international observers that the 1968 elections in Guyana were massively rigged by the introduction of the 'overseas vote'. The rigging of the elections permitted the People's National Congress party, led by Forbes Burnham, to win a majority of votes and to become the dominant party in the country, thus displacing the People's Progress Party, headed by Cheddi Jagan, to second place.<sup>1</sup> The United States Department of State (hereafter referred to as 'Department of State') "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 1982", publicly acknowledged that the elections of 1964 "were the last relatively free national elections held in Guyana."<sup>2</sup>

US support for the PNC/UF coalition Government came about because the latter initially professed to uphold western ideals, such as a free market economy. Of particular importance was Burnham's partnership with the United Force Party led by Peter d'Aguiar, which was for private enterprise. This partnership convinced the US of the PNC's 'free enterprise' spirit; support for democracy; and its belief in free and fair elections. Only time was to prove the falsity of such pronouncements. They were only a means to an end. Burnham's ultimate ambition in life was to obtain power by whatever means it took and if that meant denouncing Jagan's leftwing views, even though his deep convictions were the same, he did so. Ashton Chase summed up Forbes Burnham's character in the following statement: "... Burnham was a pragmatist and realised that leftwing views would be unacceptable by the West so he played the 'game' until he assumed the role of the Head of the Guyana Government when he began to put into operation his plans".<sup>3</sup>

Following independence in 1966, the PNC government began manipulating the electoral system in order to ensure Burnham's permanency as head of the country. Its first victim was the Electoral Commission, which had been an independent body responsible to oversee that elections were carried out freely and democratically. During the two years leading up to the 1968 elections, the PNC/UF coalition government sponsored and successfully passed through the National Assembly fundamental changes in the electoral system.<sup>4</sup> Given the voting pattern along racial lines,

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<sup>1</sup> "Guyana : Fraudulent Revolution," Report of the Latin America Bureau, The Free Press. 1970. p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Department of State, "Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 1982," February 1983, p. 532.

<sup>3</sup> A. Chase, *A Nation in Transit*. Georgetown, New Guyana Co. 1965. Ltd., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Americas Watch, " Political Freedom in Guyana." 1968, p. 12.

Burnham knew that he could never secure outright victory, so his first priority was to 'fix' every aspect of the voting system in preparation for the 1968 elections. The Electoral Commission, which in any democracy ought to be an independent institution, became the first victim. It was transformed into a political tool of the ruling party (PNC). Then followed changes in the methods of voting, which included voting by 'proxy', postal votings and the use of overseas votes.

The irregularities which ensued during the 1968 elections were captured by Granada TV, (UK) in two documentary films: "The Trail of the Vanishing Voters" and "The Making of a Prime Minister". These two films exposed the electoral fraud, particularly the abuse of the overseas votes. They found that the voters' registration list in Britain contained 44,000 names of which only 10,000 were genuine. Voters on the list had been shown to be living at non-existent addresses: in vacant lots, cemeteries, horse pastures, boarded-up butcher shops, to mention only a few. It had been reported that 95% of the overseas votes went to the PNC. In response to the results, Granada's film director said:

"Obviously I don't know what happened in Guyana, but as far as Britain is concerned, the compilation of the register was a totally dishonest and corrupt operation, and, as we have clearly established, the great majority of the people listed do not exist. This I would think is unprecedented for a Commonwealth country, as far as I know; and it's you know, a pretty awful and disgraceful episode."<sup>5</sup>

The gravity of what occurred in the 1968 election was captured by Randolph Cheeks, a member of the UF, who had been Minister of Local Government in the coalition government of 1964-1968. He summed up the situation thus: "Fraud is a mild word to describe the motions which Guyana went through on December 16, 1968."<sup>6</sup>

The elections of 1973, 1980 and 1983 under Forbes Burnham and those of 1985 and 1989 under Desmond Hoyte were similarly rigged. The PNC Government's use of the army during the elections to secure ballot boxes became a common practice. Repeated complaints of election riggings and lobbying of international, regional and non-governmental organisations, and influential private groups by the Opposition Party and individuals, both at home and abroad, led to the visit of

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<sup>5</sup> PPP Brochure, "Towards Free and Fair Elections." c.1968 p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Americas Watch, "Political Freedom in Guyana." 1968. p.30.

an International Observer Team headed by Lord Avebury, Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, to Guyana to observe the 1980 elections. In its report it found massive fraud:

"We deeply regret that...the election was rigged massively and flagrantly. Fortunately, however, the scale of the fraud made it impossible to conceal either from the Guyanese public or the outside world. Far from legitimizing President Burnham's assumption of his office, the events we witnessed confirm all the fears of Guyanese and foreign observers about the state of democracy in that country."<sup>7</sup>

It was therefore common knowledge that the regime that ruled Guyana between 1968 and 1989 was not a democratic one. Nevertheless, because the regime started out as one opposed to communism, the US government supported it and maintained that support throughout the period of the Cold War. The charges of irregularities made by the opposition were dismissed as being the usual function of opposition parties. Nevertheless, the US Department of State's 1981 report on Human Rights Practices, itself noted, after the elections of 1980, that International Observers and many Guyanese had charged, "and with apparent justification, that the elections were conducted fraudulently and cannot be considered a free and fair test of public opinion."

The 1982 Department of State Report acknowledged that:

"Guyana maintains the structure of a multi-party parliamentary republic within the Commonwealth, but the ruling People's National Congress and its leader, President Forbes Burnham, have imposed a racially oriented, minority government on the nation. The 1982 report by Freedom House, a US organisation, classified Guyana as "partly free".

"The predominantly Afro-Guyanese party and President Burnham have consolidated power, to a great extent, through such non-democratic means as electoral fraud, harassment of the opposition, and interference with the judiciary. Officially, the party operates on Marxist-Leninist principles with the goal of making Guyana a non-aligned cooperative socialist state...The 1980 Constitution, which established an executive presidency dominating the legislative branch, was a practical acknowledgement of Burnham's long-time political dominance and personal power."<sup>8</sup>

What actually was taking place in Guyana, according to the State Department Report for 1984 was summarised as follows:

"... the PNC government ruled Guyana for 20 years, preserving the façade of parliamentary democracy without the substance. The party has employed the government apparatus to advance its aims to maintain political power in the hands of

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<sup>7</sup> "Something to Remember," The Report of the International Team of Observers at the elections in Guyana, December 1980, cited in "Guyana: Fraudulent Revolution." *Op. Cit.*, The Free Press. 1970 p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Department of State, "Country Report on Human Rights Practices, 1982", February 1983. p. 532.

a ruling elite. Every election since 1964 has been marred by fraud and intimidation of the opponents of the PNC."<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding, such acknowledgement, the US Government continued to support the PNC Government throughout the period of the Cold War. The US Government favoured Forbes Burnham over Cheddi Jagan because the former had been seen as the lesser of two evils. As long as Burnham's internal actions would have no repercussions that would contradict the United States' hemispheric policies, then support was forthcoming, including economic aid, as we shall see next.

#### **b. Economic Aid**

After Burnham took office as Prime Minister of British Guiana in 1964 the US fully and consciously supported the government with economic aid for the next 28 years. Guyana was a poor country and needed all available financial assistance it could attract. From the US perspective, according economic assistance had given it some leverage over the destiny of the country. In 1971, Guyana received the highest per capita aid from the US in the hemisphere.<sup>10</sup> Though the amount decreased around the mid-1970s when Burnham began his nationalisation programme in Guyana, and with very little compensation<sup>11</sup>, the US never cancelled aid altogether. Again in 1976 the US postponed, not withdrew, aid to Burnham when he voted against the US position on Zionism and on Korea at the UN.<sup>12</sup>

US economic support was crucial to the survival of the PNC during the three decades of its repressive rule. By the 1980s the country was undergoing a severe economic crisis. Though President Reagan acknowledged in Congress, that: "...fair and free elections are of course an essential element in the democratic process" and the US was aware that there was a controversy existing about the elections in Guyana in 1984, he made no effort to curb Burnham's excesses and abuses. Instead, in the President's Proclamation 5909<sup>13</sup> he designated Guyana as one of the beneficiary countries to profit from US Trade liberalising measures and to receive US aid under the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (CBERA). In making Guyana eligible for US assistance

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<sup>9</sup> Department of State, "Country Report on Human Practices, 1984," p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, 11 August 1977.

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, 9 January 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Proclamation 5909, To designate Guyana as a Beneficiary Country for Purposes of the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act," Nov. 18, 1988. *Inter-American Affairs*, 1988, p. 1555.

Reagan stated that "Guyana had demonstrated to my satisfaction that its laws, practices, and policies are in conformity with the designated criteria of the CBERA."<sup>14</sup>

With this combination of internal oppression and US economic support, Guyana would stumble along until the end of the Cold War. Political change would come about only after the end of the Cold War.

### **3. The Situation in Guyana, 1992-2002**

With the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the break-up of the former Soviet Union players, such as Cheddi Jagan were no longer a threat to the West. An international momentum began to develop in favour of free and fair elections.

In Guyana in 1992, a broad range of international actors, particularly former US President Jimmy Carter, managed to persuade the PNC leader, former President Desmond Hoyt, to accept the results of the elections held that year. Cheddi Jagan thus returned to power as President twenty-eight years after he was out-maneuvered in 1964. Cheddi Jagan was respected as a nationalist patriot and his Presidency between 1992 and 1996 saw peace and increased growth rates in the country. His death saw national mourning of a kind never before witnessed in the country.

Cheddi Jagan, however, had not arranged his successor and his wife, Janet Jagan was elected President in 1997, after a short period in which Prime Minister Sam Hinds ascended to the Presidency. As a foreign-born white woman, Janet Jagan was particularly hated by the PNC, which bitterly resented her ascendancy to the Presidency. The election was challenged by an election petition which actually succeeded three years later. Riots and violence carried out by the PNC supporters in the city, Georgetown, led to mediation by the regional Organisation, the CARICOM. This led to an agreement "that elections would be held in three years." Those elections were held in March 2001 and resulted in the election of the PPP candidate, Bharat Jagdeo, who had ascended the

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<sup>14</sup> Reagan's letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate on the Designation of Guyana as a Beneficiary Developing Country, 18 Nov. 1988. *Inter-American Affairs*, 1988. p. 1555.



Presidency the year before, following Janet Jagan's illness. As of the time of writing an uneasy peace, if barely, is holding.

Fundamentally, Guyana's problem is one of the lack of power-sharing arrangement between the two main races. The lack of such an arrangement is a direct legacy of the Cold War. In 1953 the country was not given an opportunity to develop healthy political debate. Between 1954 and 1957 there was direct British rule. Between 1957 and 1961 the PPP-PNC split had been engineered by the Americans mainly. Between 1961 and 1964 the inter-party talks on the country's constitutional future were not freely negotiated among the parties but manipulated by the Anglo-American coalition which brought in proportional representation that further exacerbated racial rioting. Between 1964 and 1992, there was no possibility of inter-party dialogue on the constitutional future of the country. To the contrary, in 1980 the PNC brought in a blatantly one-sided constitution. Between 1992 and 2000 there have been a few constitutional reforms but no serious attempt at power-sharing. To the contrary, the PPP returned to power in 1992 following foreign representation, has found the PNC constitution of 1980 to its liking while the PNC would like to bring down its own handiwork.

Until a good power-sharing arrangement has been freely negotiated in good faith by the political parties in Guyana, the country will never achieve real peace. It can thus be fairly concluded that Cold War considerations prevented a local dialogue on constitutional arrangements between 1953 and 1992 and that this has persisted ever since. Guyana's plight in 2001 is thus a direct consequence of the Cold War policies and strategies of the UK and USA, which were reacting to the activism of the PPP leaders, particularly Cheddi and Janet Jagan, during this period. In short, the naïveté of Cheddi Jagan, a well-meant nationalist, brought the hammer-blow of the Cold War upon his country, executed first by the British and then by the Americans. Domestic political considerations in the USA in the run-up to the 1964 elections Presidential Elections were more important than any USSR confrontation with the West.

#### 4. Conclusion

The political and economic problems being experienced by Guyana to this day are directly linked to the divisions that were sown by the UK and the USA among the local population between 1953 and 1966. Because of cold war considerations that continued until the elections of 1992, Guyana did not have an opportunity to undergo normal political evolution. National harmony in a multiracial country is particularly difficult to achieve. Because the political situation in Guyana was controlled by the USA in particular in the post-independence period until the first free elections were held in 1992, the country did not have an opportunity to work out an embracing national vision, to develop parties across racial lines and to experience non-racial politics. The country has effectively remained in the grip of divisions sown in the period 1953 to 1966 and instigated even thereafter while the cold war lasted.

Having presented this snapshot of post-independent Guyana we turn now to the concluding part of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER 9**

## **CONCLUSION**

This conclusion will present our main findings, comment on how the Guyana story fits into the general picture of the Cold War; and touch briefly on implications for future research.

In this thesis we have sought to examine the events in British Guiana in 1953 that led the British and the American Governments to perceive a communist threat. The evidence examined has shown that in our assessment the leaders of the PPP genuinely wished to improve the living conditions of Guianese, advocated civil rights for British Guianese and sought to bring about changes in British Guiana, but were often careless, bombastic or reckless in their actions. The PPP leadership had hardliners as well as moderates. Prior to the suspension of the Constitution in 1953 PPP Ministers behaved as activists and it was hard to distinguish between Government and labour agitation.

In the events leading up to the suspension of the Constitution in 1953 the documentary records confirm that while the Americans were following a Communist threat in British Guiana on their own, the British move to suspend the constitution was done largely on their own. Senior State Department Officials had to scramble to find out what was going on. From the briefing CIA Director Allen Dulles gave to the National Security Council just before the suspension, it is possible that the CIA may have been briefed by British Intelligence. Quickly, however, the British and Americans came together and cooperated in shoring up diplomatic support for the suspension in Latin America and the Commonwealth.

Following the suspension of the Constitution the situation quietened down in British Guiana until the end of the 1950s. The PPP, though returned to power in the elections in 1957 governed moderately even though they continued with leftist agitation. During this period from 1953-1959 British-American cooperation could be seen in the provision of limited economic and technical support for British Guiana.

The arrival of the Kennedy Administration coincided with a British push to dismantle its empire and to grant independence to those of its colonies in a position to stand on their own. At the

start of the Kennedy Administration the NSC had identified major communist threats in Cuba and in British Guiana. The Kennedy Administration could therefore be expected to be vigilant about independence for British Guiana under the PPP. This was heightened following the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and President Kennedy and his Administration became even more sensitive to accusations that during his Presidency another South American country would "fall" to communism. On top of this, President Kennedy, to begin with, and then President Johnson after him, did not wish the threat of Communism in British Guiana to become an issue in the election campaign of 1964. Both the Kennedy and the Johnson Administrations sought to ensure that British Guiana would not achieve independence before the elections of November 1964.

During this period Anglo-American cooperation led to the introduction, in 1964, of the system of proportional representation which had the effect of denying the PPP an outright majority of seats in the Legislative Assemblies. Thereafter a coalition Government led by Forbes Burnham and Peter D'Aguiar and was favoured by the Americans came to power. This coalition would take British Guiana to independence on 26 May 1966. Between 1964 and 1966 British-American cooperation would concentrate on: (i) bringing British Guiana to independence; and (ii) containing Venezuela in its territorial claims on British Guiana.

Between 1968 and 1992, the Americans, for Cold War reasons, mostly shored up an undemocratic and corrupt regime in Guyana which they considered less dangerous than a Government under Cheddi Jagan. During this period the country declined in practically every sector. In 1992, with the end of the Cold War and a push internationally for free elections, it took the efforts of a broad range of external actors, particularly former United States President Jimmy Carter, to get the PNC regime to accept the results of the free and fair elections held that year. However, the racial rivalry between Guyanese of African and those of East Indian descent, which had been fomented in the period 1953-1964 has persisted. The elections of 1997 were followed by rioting and violence perpetrated by supporters of the PNC, mainly Afro-Guyanese. The elections of

2000 saw similar rioting and racial violence. Guyana has thus so far not been able to find internal stability following its Cold War fate.

Our examination of the materials presented in the preceding chapters leads to the following conclusions: British Guiana, now Guyana, hardly presented any real threat to either the United States or the United Kingdom between 1953 and 1966. However, one could understand that after the situations in Guatemala in the 1950s and Cuba in the 1960s, the Americans would want to avoid the perception of a domino effect.

Cheddi Jagan, of professedly Marxist-Leninist belief throughout his political career, had openly flaunted this, thereby adding to American fears and possibly contributing to the fearful reaction. As a direct result of the Cold War struggle Cheddi Jagan was ousted from power in 1953 and 1964 and only allowed to return to power in 1992 after the Cold War had ended.

After the split of the PPP in 1955 Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham became rivals for power. Forbes Burnham first professed to be anti-communist and aligned himself with the United States of America in the struggle against communism. Subsequently he would declare his party a Marxist-Leninist party. His quest for power was all-consuming and the fact that the country became divided along racial lines was of little concern to him. Jagan for his part paid little heed to the concerns of the United States at the height of the Cold War. He openly aligned himself with the Communist bloc. Jagan and Burnham thus have their part of the responsibility for what ensued in Guyana.

Due largely to Cold War considerations, the people of Guyana suffered grievously from political, economic and social corruption between 1964 and 1992 but this was of secondary concern to the West, particularly the USA, because it was engaged in a fight to win the Cold War. The people of Guyana continue to suffer to this day.

What distinguishes Guyana from a situation such as that in Guatemala and some other Latin American countries, where internal disputes were interpreted as communist-inspired, is that in British Guyana foreign agents incited internal unrest so as to support a charge of communist subversion. This occurred particularly in the 1960 - 64 period when American trade unionists were

present on the ground in British Guiana leading strike operations and agitation against the government.

The historical evidence confirms Anglo-American collaboration following the ouster of Jagan in 1953, as well as, in planning and implementing his ouster in 1964.

Of the three major powers discussed in this thesis, the USA was the major Cold War actor in British Guiana, with the UK in a supportive role. The USSR impacted upon Guyana as part of its world-wide sponsorship of revolutionary change and in places such as the United Nations, particularly the Committee on Decolonisation. The evidence indicates, however, that the Marxist-Leninist leadership of Jagan was homegrown rather than a plant from the Soviet Union. However, Cheddi Jagan is widely believed to have been influenced by Janet Jagan, who is said to have had roots with the international communist movement going back to her youth in the USA. If that were to be the case then Guyana would have witnessed the paradoxical situation of Marxism-Leninism coming to it from the United States and then being fought for four decades by the very same United States.

John Lewis Gaddis has correctly pointed out, in our view, that it is important to keep in mind not only what the actual threat was in particular situations during the Cold War but also how the major protagonists saw their positions in the Cold War struggle and whether there was reason enough for them to have a fear of a Communist threat in any particular situation. This case study of British Guiana between 1953 and 1966, shows that while there was no evidence of an external threat, the way local leaders behaved gave reasonable cause for the British and the Americans to be concerned about the situation.

Another dimension of the British Guiana story is that it falls within “domino reasoning”. The United States, particularly in the 1960s, was not willing to see another domino fall in the Caribbean and South America after Cuba.

A third aspect of this case study of British Guiana is that it shows that domestic political considerations in the United States played an important role in the policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson in particular. Each had his eyes in turn on the 1964 presidential elections.

A fourth aspect of this case study of British Guiana is that it has thrown up first hand evidence of the extent to which British and American trade unions were involved in the fight against communism even in relatively small territories.

In conducting this case study of British Guiana in the period 1953 to 1966 we have tried to use all of the materials that were available to us. There are however, two areas in which materials that might exist are not available. These are the files and minutes of the PPP during this period, which are known to exist, but which are carefully guarded. Another set of materials would be the reports of the intelligence services in the UK and the USA. There are reports, referred to by reputable authorities, such as Stephen Rabe<sup>1</sup> himself, that the CIA has destroyed the bulk of its records. If these records have not actually been destroyed they would be of immense interest to future historians.

At the end of this study it is appropriate to ask what it suggests for the future of Guyana and the Third World. It is submitted that the case study of British Guiana indicates that countries that were Cold War theaters need to draw historical lessons as to how the Cold War was fought in their country and how the consequences are being felt today. Political leaders and the population of Guyana generally might not be aware that they are still acting roles cast for them by the major players during the Cold War.

What does this case study show for future relations between Guyana and the West? It is submitted that the impact of the Cold War struggle, though still felt within the country internally, has no continuing external effects for the country. With the collapse of Communism and the end of the Cold War, Guyana is in a normal strategic relationship with the United States of America and a cooperative relationship within the framework of the European Union and the Association of

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<sup>1</sup> S. Rabe, "John F. Kennedy and Latin America," in *Diplomatic History*. Vol. 23. No. 3. Summer 1999. pp. 533-539.



Caribbean and Pacific States. In the case of the United States it is now particularly interested in countries such as Guyana in the fight against drug trafficking and crime.

When it comes to the future study of the Cold War our principal conclusion is that each country that was a theatre of Cold War combat must undergo a conscious examination of how Cold War battles of the past continue to have an effect on the country today. In the case of British Guiana the divisions fomented among the population between 1953 and 1966 continue to exact a heavy toll today. To be able to move forward, countries such as Guyana must know the burdens they continue to carry from the Cold War period. Guyana continues to carry a heavy Cold War burden.

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