

Chapter XI

Strife not Strike (1963)

The Romans worshipped their standards; and the Roman standard happened to be an eagle. Our standard is only one-tenth of an eagle — a dollar — but we make all even by adoring it with tenfold devotion.

Edgar Allan Poe

In 1962, the dissentient elements had used the budget to start trouble. In 1963, their pretext for the strife was the Labour Relations Bill.

This Bill introduced in March, was essentially similar to the one which we had introduced in 1953 when Burnham was a member of the government. It provided for a secret poll of workers by which the union securing the majority of votes would become the recognized union.

Actually, we had a mandate to enact such a law by virtue of three successive general elections which we had won on the basis of a platform which emphasized this measure. Jurisdictional disputes had long bedevilled the local trade-union movement. Indeed, on April 5, 1963, a dispute between unions at the Rice Marketing Board, which the management and the TUC had been unable to resolve, led to serious disturbances. These events made the introduction of the bill urgent and necessary.

The general strike which started on April 18, 1963, lasted for 80 days. Before its commencement, the ground had been carefully prepared. Both opposition parties whipped up their followers into a state of frenzy. Demonstrations were regularly organised in Georgetown; the Public Buildings where the Legislative Assembly meets were frequently picketed when the legislature was in session, and insults and abuses were

hurled at PPP legislators.

In his speeches, Burnham used mysterious-sounding and ominous language, calculated to foment hatred and violence. He spoke continually of the "power" of his followers which "no hell or high water" could stop and summoned them to pursue mysterious "plans". To incite them, he spoke continually of threats on his life.

On March 17, the PNC and the TUC organized a demonstration in Georgetown against unemployment. Some of the hooligan elements who took part in the demonstration attacked the PPP and PYO (Progressive Youth Organisation, youth arm of the PPP) picketers, shouting "We don't want independence"; we had decided to counter the demonstration by picketing Government House (the Governor's residence) with placards calling for independence and stating that colonialism was the real cause of the unemployment. Freedom House was also stoned.

Speaking to a gathering on the same day at the Parade Ground, Burnham said: "You have stopped the nonsense which was being perpetrated this morning. In fact, comrades, you do not realize your power, but I do not want you to use your power recklessly. We must be able to use our power with control and discretion. For instance, some of you who were at the demonstrations this afternoon witnessed what happened when we came to the corner of Lamaha and High Streets, when the police officer, Mr. McGill Smith, who fills an office which should have been filled by one of our Guyanese officers, became frightened when he thought that we were going straight. Comrades, if we wanted to go straight, we could have gone straight, no hell or high water could have stopped us." (The reference was to the attempt of the demonstrators to deviate from the route approved by the police and march past my residence.)

On March 24, Burnham cleverly incited his supporters at a public meeting held in Georgetown saying: "The PPP plan violence and propose to execute violence . . . but if they do anything unfortunate we must be in a position to apply the remedy." A little previously, working on his racist theme, Burnham had accused the PPP in New York on March 8 of

“packing the police force with officers of Indian descent who form the main support of the PPP”, also that “Jagan is giving civil service posts to the ‘blue-eyed’ boys of the Party.” These allegations were deliberately made to arouse animosity toward our government and antagonism against the Indian population. They were completely and demonstrably untrue.

This incitement led to PNC and UF mass demonstrations and picketing round the Public Buildings on March 27 and 28. The hostile crowds broke the police cordon and molested and abused PPP legislators.

On April 5, 1963, the city experienced another shameful outburst of hooliganism, a “little” Black Friday, with attacks against workers at the Rice Marketing Board who were PPP supporters, rioting and looting of over 10 stores; one looter was shot dead. On the day before the strike began, after hearing that the Civil Service Association (CSA) was likely to join the strike, I asked its executive to see me at my office. “Gentlemen,” I said, “I understand that you propose to join the strike. In 1962 when you participated in the strike you said that you had a legitimate claim, that the government had been unsympathetic to your just demands. I am not aware that you have any major grievances pending. Can you please let me know whether what I have heard is true, and, if so, why are you going on strike?” Speaking for the CSA Dr. Balwant Singh, the president, said that the CSA as an affiliate of the TUC was joining the strike in solidarity. At this point, I said that in 1953, the TUC represented by Brentnol Blackman, Andrew Jackson and L. F. S. Burnham had supported a similar measure and asked what the CSA saw objectionable in the Bill. Balwant Singh replied: “It is not our duty to go into the merits or demerits of the Bill; that is the job of the TUC which has called the strike.” I urged them to reconsider their decision in the light of their responsibility to the public and of the grave consequences which would flow from their action.

My efforts were in vain; the CSA joined the strike. Those civil servants who remained loyal were intimidated. Mimeographed notes threatened: “It is cowardly and selfish to allow yourself to be intimidated into going to work. Cowards

role. They declared that the strike was costing them a great deal of money, but information reached me that some of their foremen and officials were urging the workers to remain on strike. Those who wonder how it could happen that trade union leaders opposed the PPP may find the answer in the equally extraordinary question — how could it happen that employers could encourage a strike?

The Shipping Association also supported the strike. Some companies in the Association refused to unload ships already in harbour and to bring in other ships which were bound for Guiana. They even refused to allow goods unloaded in Curaçao, Barbados, Trinidad and Surinam to be transported by government boats and small private craft. Their excuse was that their ships would be “blacklisted” in the world’s ports by the TUC through ORIT and ICFTU.

The shipping blockage created many shortages, particularly of items such as matches, onions, salt, tobacco and cigarettes. Stocks held in several business premises were issued only to people on strike and inevitably hoarding and profitable speculation were resorted to by people opposed to our party.

Although prices were raised on many items, the people did not go hungry from shortage of supplies. Local production quickly filled the vacuum created by shortages of imported foods; the Guyanese people began to consume every conceivable local substitute which before had normally been shunned.

Air communication, except for a few single-engine light private planes, was also virtually cut off. The major international airlines ceased flights on the pretext that there were not enough operating airport personnel, particularly in the fire services. The Royal Dutch Airlines at first appeared willing to breach the blockade, but pressure was applied. British West Indian Airways was at one stage prepared to recommence its flights on a limited basis after I had assured the manager and the Trinidad Government’s Minister of Communications by telephone and cable that we could provide the minimum air traffic control resources. But soon after I was told that the Trinidad Cabinet had intervened and the flights were cancelled. I sent my private secretary, Jack Kelshall, to Trinidad to see the

and traitors like you are found everywhere and have suffered the same fate always — liquidation. We do not want this to happen to you, for all Freedom Loving Guyanese despise you for your actions. My advice to you then is to stop being a traitor to the cause of a free and democratic trade union movement in our country. This is just an admonition."

Admonition was soon followed by physical violence and personal indignities; one girl was stripped of all her clothing.

Big business also threw in its weight behind the strike. On this occasion, unlike 1962, the TUC and big business strategists, with the help of the ICFTU, ORIT and the American Institute of Free Labour Development, laid their plans carefully. Fire had proved a costly and dangerous weapon in 1962; in 1963, the weapon was a sea and air blockade. Their intention was to sit quietly — the slogan was "Passive Resistance" — and let the noose gradually strangle us.

Big business surpassed itself in 1963; it participated in lockouts and kept striking employees on its payroll. On June 7, Peter d'Aguiar told a public meeting that it was clear that "big business was in sympathy with the cause of the strike" and called for support, saying that it was "the duty of the businessmen to endeavour to stretch their finances in order to help the workers now on strike."

The sugar planters who claimed neutrality did everything to help the political opposition and the TUC after the MPCA had failed to get the sugar workers out on strike. They came to the rescue of the MPCA with a lockout of workers at their sugar factories! When I spoke to one of the directors, I was informed that the sugar factories would not be able to "grind" for any period of time because the bulk-storage plant at Providence, East Demerara, was on strike. A few days later when the workers resumed work at the bulk-storage plant, I again contacted the director. He then shifted his ground and remarked that there were not enough skilled personnel to man the factories. I said that with the available skilled personnel the factories could "grind" 3 or 4 days a week or in rotation. I was then advised that there was fear of sabotage!

The bauxite companies also played a somewhat ambiguous

Prime Minister, but he refused to grant him an interview.

Kelshall was sent to Trinidad for an even more important assignment — the flow of Trinidad oil. Oil was our Achilles heel, a fact well-known to the oil companies, which worked in close collaboration with the strikers. (The TUC and not the government was put in charge of distribution of fuel; the companies claimed that if the government were put in charge, the strikers would not collaborate. As a result, the rice industry, largely run by our supporters, was starved of fuel and nearly one-third of the rice crop was lost.) Soon the oil tankers ceased coming, the companies claimed that through the influence of the Caribbean Congress of Labour, the oil and dock workers in Trinidad regarded the tankers coming to Guiana as “black” and were unwilling to handle them. But Kelshall found that there had been really no hitch. When I disclosed this to the oil companies, they then used the pretexts of risk or sabotage and an unsatisfactory harbour pilot service; the pilots had gone on strike.

However, after a great deal of persuasion Shell agreed to bring in 3 tankers on condition that we made proper security arrangements and provided a pilot; the U.S. companies Esso and Texaco refused to cooperate. One Shell tanker came in with the help of a British Navy pilot and for security reasons was taken to New Amsterdam to discharge. Afterward, pressure was put on the company and the trips of the other 2 tankers were cancelled even though I had told the company that the government was prepared to provide additional insurance cover and to indemnify it against loss or damage of its ships by fire or sabotage. For his cooperation with us the local supervisor of the Shell installations at Ramsburg, East Bank of Demerara, was later victimized.

Realizing that the fuel-oil situation would soon become critical, I requested the Governor to ask the British government to get oil supplies from other sources such as Venezuela and the Netherlands Antilles or through the British Navy. His reply was that it would not be practical. It was at this stage that I appealed to the Cuban government for help.

The response of the Cuban government was prompt and

positive, but its problem was to get a tanker. Our problem was to get storage tanks; the U.S. government had refused to allow us the use of unused fuel tanks at its de-activated Atkinson Field Air Base although it had been under lease to the government. The U.S. oil companies also refused to allow us the use of their storage tanks at Ramsburg. Finally, we stored the fuel in the tanks of the Electricity Corporation in Georgetown and in the Shell storage tanks at New Amsterdam.

As in 1962, sections of the press supported the politicians in their efforts to incite the people against us. Every journalistic gimmick was used to whip up racial feeling and to spread hate and fear.

In a letter signed "Brin" and captioned "Workers Unite", which appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* on June 20, 1963, there was a call for violence and revolt by the people, and for them to take the law into their own hands "because where words have failed, force has prevailed. And I call on all like me who have sat quietly watching and waiting for a solution, and who can no longer bear hardships, to revolt. The British have sent their swaggering soldiers into our country to suppress our feelings but no imperialist guns can hold us any longer. Let us unite and by the means of silent violence such as in Venezuela and Algeria, show the bloody British, TUC and Jagan and his government that the workers will settle the affair." In some cases, incitement was not so crudely put. Yet it came out quite overtly as when the *Chronicle* in an editorial, on April 30 advised its readers: "The Premier seems to wish to drive the masses to the point of desperation. Once past that point, anything can happen." In a letter to the *Chronicle* of May 9, the same theme appeared: "Take care Cheddi: We are showing a great deal of restraint, but do not push us too far. There is a point of no return and we are nearly there."

On May 20, the *Evening Post* in an article headed "Counter Measures" stated: "But under cover of the Emergency Order, Government Ministers have resorted to measures which undoubtedly call for more physical opposition."

Blatant calls to violence were often reinforced by various less subtle exhortations to loot and rob. For instance, the

Chronicle of May 22, in its editorial, wrote: "What is the police doing about these black-marketeers [*sic*] in view of the possibility that the public may be incited to violence against them and loot their premises?"

The frequent headlines of the type, "Efforts to starve urban people," "Butchers of Georgetown," "Toll the bell for Dr. Jagan, dig deep his grave" were meant to fan the flames of resentment and breed violence, especially when such headlines captioned stories such as the report of the broadcast of the Mayor of Georgetown and PNC legislator, Claude Merriman. In this broadcast, Merriman threatened: "Should the provocations and rumours continue with reported supporting incidents that the citizens of Georgetown are to be starved out, the provokers will be solely responsible for any action the angry and hungry citizens may take; and it will not avail to attempt to identify racial intolerance with the hungry masses."

Large photographs with racial implications were published almost daily in the press and especially in the *Chronicle*: On June 13, the *Chronicle*, on its front page, published a large composite photograph of an Indian businessman with a gun on his shoulder, next to this and inset, was the photograph of an African lying on the ground as if dead. The implication was clear: an Indian businessman had killed an African worker. The businessman in question had, of course, done nothing of the kind. Similar photographs appeared almost every day in the *Chronicle*.

The editorial of the *Evening Post* of June 6, stated: "The Governor is asked to take a look at the latest move to deny the people of Georgetown the domestic use of flour while making the same available to the supporters of the Government in the People's Progressive Party strongholds."

This statement was designed to whip up racial feeling. The same newspaper on June 28, after attacking "retailers who are largely drawn from one race group" concluded in an editorial with the following: "As we see it, the effect of the distribution of essential supplies through the Competent Authority has been to direct benefits to one race, both by way of filling their larder and their pockets as well."

Under the guise of attacking the Competent Authority, the editor had obviously set out to preach racialism by the "big lie" technique, so effectively used by the Nazis. The same editor must have thought that he had achieved his end when he wrote with satisfaction on July 3, 1963: "Racial feeling and tension are here to stay and can now never be wiped out unless there is a considerable change in the fortunes of this country — and this by now looks more than ever a hundred years away."

This article had the ambiguous caption, "No national unity" — either an exhortation or a description, as you choose.

Early in January 1964, the *Daily Chronicle* carried a hair-raising report that 250 firearms consigned to Guiana Import Export Limited (with the implication that they had been imported privately for arming PPP supporters) had been seized by the police. Although the Customs Department denied the story, the newspaper persisted in highlighting it.

Similar wild stories were printed during the strike about Cuban warships in the waters of Guiana, and about Guiana being the transshipment point for illicit supplies of arms and ammunition to the Venezuelan guerrillas. On April 14, 1963, the *Sun*, the weekly organ of the United Force, carried a fantastic story captioned, "Children May Be Sent To Factories: Vicious Plans Bared." "The Government plans to take children from the upper division of primary schools and put them to work in communist factories. This revelation was made by a source close to the Government which plans to take children who have failed their exams twice in the 4th and 5th and 6th standards and put them to work in factories to be built here. Parents were incensed at this news and it is reported that as soon as Jagan removes the Emergency Regulations parents will demonstrate in the vicinity of the Public Buildings against this rascally plan of the Government. First the Government took control of schools. Now the Government plans to throw your children out of the schools and put them to work in factories to be built by Communists. Is this good enough for you parents?"

Such was the role of the "free" press in creating civil unrest.

Little wonder, then, that when the TUC's call for a general strike caused a shutdown of the daily newspaper, the TUC immediately ordered the printing workers back to work even without prior consultation with the Printers Industrial Union.

Handbills issued by opponents of the government also called for violence and blood. To cite but a few:

Let us not be afraid to STRIKE
Let us not be afraid to be STRUCK
Let us not be afraid to SHOOT
Let us not be afraid to be SHOT
Let us not be afraid of ANYTHING BECAUSE
VICTORY is at hand.

If VIOLENCE becomes unavoidable, We must be as
RUTHLESS AND MORE DESTRUCTIVE than
CHEDDI'S Armed Forces.

How long will the dictators triumph? Free yourselves
NOW of those who seek to trespass on your rights. Or be
DOOMED forever. Comrades, the PPP can no longer rule
as exhibited: They must RESIGN or be DESTROYED for
the benefit of GUYANA. Comrades the TIME is RIPE.
We want a reasonable decision: Either Free Guyana Today
Or We'll Have Blood Tomorrow.

The streets, sidewalks and sea-wall were also painted with similar slogans. Kelshall was particularly attacked by the hate-mongers. At one point Richard Ishmael, TUC President, claimed that he had been shot at while in his car, when the police made a thorough search they could find no evidence of shooting.

The prolonged incitement of the populace eventually erupted in violence for which plans had been carefully laid. Investigations disclosed the existence of an insurrectionary movement, which had carried out military training and had concerted plans for the forcible overthrow of the government. A police raid in early May on Congress Place, the headquarters of the People's National Congress, brought to light a great deal of arms, other offensive weapons and ammunition, a number of documents, including assassination plots and plans

for extensive military training, and acids and chemicals for bomb-making. One of these documents read:

These are the rules governing X 13:

The Committee should comprise of men governing different sections of a particular type of work. The Chairman could be a person employed by the party and of a very high character, subject to the approval of the Council. I, therefore, recommend Comrade Van Gendrine. He would be known or referred to as the "Old Man". He will be responsible directly to the leader Comrade L. F. S. Burnham for projects, plans, etc., of this organization, he would be adviser, organizer and co-ordinator.

Comrade I. Thomas would be responsible for all the military training and military advice, posting of men for different duties and all orders should come through him from the committee, to the men. All leaders and sub-leaders of the military side should deal directly with Comrade I. Thomas, he will be responsible to the committee for all action taken, *he should not arrive at a decision unless first discussing same with the committee.*

No one should have the right to communicate directly or indirectly to a member or members, any orders. All orders must come through the person responsible for that section. Comrade Wilson will be responsible for radio communication and all records, he will also be responsible to the committee and no one should have the right to interfere with this field of work, unless first going through Comrade Wilson, who will be responsible to the committee. Comrade Smith will be responsible for Medical Supplies [*sic*] and advice, he will also be responsible for all actions taken.

Comrade Leacock will be a spear to the committee and he will be known as Area Commander, he will be responsible to Comrade I. Thomas, for all military actions taken in that area. These six gentlemen would form the committee which would dictate the policy of this organization, and no action should be taken unless the matter was discussed by the committee comprised of the said men.

Other material relating to the insurrectionary plot was found at the homes of other PNC activists. At the home of "Comrade I. Thomas" named in the "X 13" plan were found manuals on training and firearms, and a book on guerrilla warfare. There was evidence that training in the use of arms and in

"commando tactics" and in the making of explosives had already proceeded quite far.

The discovery of the existence of this insurrectionary plot evoked public horror and caused a temporary halt to the violence. The TUC in an attempt to disassociate itself from the PNC plot to use force to overthrow the government, declared that in May and June its campaign was to be based on "passive resistance". But after a temporary lull, the passive resistance campaign passed into the most active form of violence.

The PNC led the campaign of incitement and violence. Speaking at Bourda Green on May 24, when the strike was a month old, Burnham said: "The PNC does not fear an authoritarian regime, the PNC says that if you give the PPP an opportunity over the other parties to get a majority of seats with a minority of votes, such a party would attempt to form an authoritarian regime, using the Legislature as an instrument, and therefore you see there would have to be a shifting of the scene of agitation and opposition from the Legislature to places where they grow rice. And who will benefit from that — The PPP cannot suppress us, beat us, more or less until thy kingdom comes. We can give more than we take . . . they (the PPP) plan violence and they want to propose to execute violence. Comrades, well I say this, that we should keep the pressure on them, and if, perchance, they do anything absurd or unfortunate, we must be in a position to apply the remedy. As I told you earlier my life is worth nothing. I am prepared to give it so that my people in this country, so that my fellow Guyanese, may live in freedom and prosperity after . . ."

Burnham's reference to the "places where they grow rice" was charged with strong racial overtones. No wonder the disturbances soon spread to East Demerara.

Violence erupted on an intensified scale soon after the arrival on June 17 of the Cuban tanker, *m.v. Cuba*, with fuel and gasoline. To the opposition, the tanker symbolized the breaking of their blockade and the strike. From that moment, our opponents knew that they were defeated. Discarding the sham of the TUC that the strike was industrial, the PNC took over direct leadership from the TUC and started an intensified attack

against individuals, private homes, and government buildings. Nothing was sacred any longer, not even churches, mosques or the law courts.

Indians going peacefully about their business were attacked in Georgetown and were mercilessly and savagely beaten. The first major outbreak was on May 30 on the occasion of the funeral of Senator Claude Christian, Minister of Home Affairs. Disorder broke out among the crowds which had gathered along the funeral route. The funeral service at the Roman Catholic Church in Brickdam, Georgetown, was interrupted by the howling crowd inside the church. At the graveside, we were mobbed. Several people, including ministers and their bodyguards and members of the family of the deceased, were stoned. I was hit on the head, the car in which I travelled was bombarded with stones. The unruly mobs later roved about the town injuring Indians and damaging their businesses. Nearly 50 persons, mainly Indians, were attacked and beaten. Several of them were severely injured. In a few cases, members of other races, who, horrified by what was happening, intervened to help, were also subjected to violence. Later that night, Indians were attacked in their homes, beaten and robbed.

The events of May 30 were the beginning of the attack on Indians and anyone suspected of being a government supporter. In the weeks that followed, not a day passed without some outbreak of looting, hooliganism, violence and cowardly attacks. Any Indian who dared to walk the streets of Georgetown was attacked and savagely beaten, often in full view of the police. One Indian was beaten to death; others were maimed and incapacitated for life.

The attacks on Indians were accompanied by similar attacks on civil servants of all races who had refused to go on strike. These attacks were designed to prevent them from working and so bring the administration to a standstill.

The opposition also directed violence against PPP legislators and ministers of the government. George Robertson, a member of the Legislative Assembly, was attacked after leaving a meeting of the Assembly on May 17, 1963. Legislator

On June 11, the crowds again assembled around the Public Buildings. Later that morning they looted stalls in the Stabroek Market and beat up a number of Indians. The Commissioner was informed but no action was taken.

At about midday, several Indians were severely beaten by thugs just outside the Public Buildings, but nothing was done to help the victims. A gang of about 20 men mobbed an Indian youth, beat him to the ground, and after robbing him, went over his body, raining blow after blow. One of the attackers poked him repeatedly with a large stick between the legs. When a senior member of my staff spoke to the police, he was told, "Don't be hysterical; policemen are in the area, but we will send some more." The Minister of Communications, Gladstone Wilson, was assaulted while leaving his Ministry at the General Post Office Building.

In the afternoon, having seen a further deterioration in the situation, and realizing that firm action was not being taken to disperse the riotous mob, I urged the Governor to summon a meeting with the Commissioner of Police and the Commander of the British Troops, Colonel Pemberton, for 4.30 p.m. A little earlier, at about 2 p.m. I had been forced to disturb the Governor during his rest period to bring to his attention the alarming situation.

At the meeting at Government House, I requested that British troops should be brought out immediately to aid the civil power. The first thing the Governor asked was what I thought the British troops could do! It was finally agreed that starting early next morning, June 12, the Army would do static duty at places to be decided by Colonel Pemberton in consultation with the Commissioner. It was my view that the Electricity Corporation, the Rice Marketing Board, the Water Works and the Public Buildings should be areas at which the Army should do static duty: the Governor agreed on the inclusion of the Rice Marketing Board, a trouble spot where a Soviet vessel was docked and Cuban ships were due to arrive later. Colonel Pemberton, however, wished to give the matter further thought and suggested that we meet the next morning when he would give his decision on my suggestion about the

Moses Bhagwan sustained a head wound, and Senator Christina Ramjattan was attacked and had to be hospitalized.

Inevitably these attacks led to reprisals in the rural areas and to further violence. Many decent-minded Guyanese were horrified at what was taking place. Dr. D. J. Tait, a respected Guyanese medical practitioner and a founding member of the People's National Congress, addressed a letter to the press on June 8. (The *Guiana Graphic* suppressed it.) He accused Burnham of turning his back on national unity, of leading his followers "into a blind alley of improvised tribalism at variance with the economic and social realities of the two major ethnic groups of our country, for they were already well on their way to national integration . . . It is not too late," concluded Dr. Tait, "for Mr. Burnham to change his course and lead in the right direction . . ."

By June 10, the PNC embarked on a campaign with women and children squatting in government offices, and bands of youths and men roaming the streets on foot and in bicycle brigades, attacking mainly Indians whom they regarded as government supporters.

On the same morning when I entered the Public Buildings, there were several people waiting at the entrance. They followed me upstairs. Soon after, I saw them squatting on the floor outside my office. They were quickly joined by a large number of others who sat on the desks and chairs of officers of the Ministry and on the floor of the various rooms. The same invasion and obstruction occurred in the Ministry of Finance and in other offices in the Public Buildings.

I left at about 9.15 a.m. for Le Resouvenir, East Demerara, to lecture at Accabre College. On my return at about 11.30 a.m. I was advised not to go to my office because the crowds in and round the Public Buildings had become larger and unruly.

Members of the staff of my Ministry and of the Audit Department had been attacked. I spoke to the Commissioner of Police and advised him to disperse the crowds as they were contravening the proclamation which forbade assemblies of five or more persons, and to request that the British Army should be asked to aid the police. He did not agree.

deployment of the Army.

The three of us met at Government House as arranged; the Governor was not present. Colonel Pemberton said that it was unwise to use military forces at that time as the police were not incapable of coping with the situation, and that my suggestion about the deployment of his forces, if the military were to be used, was contrary to all his training and experience. He emphasized that I was not a professional soldier and did not know what I was talking about.

I told Colonel Pemberton that I was no expert on military matters, but that my suggestions were based on my experience of the people of the country. I warned him that an ugly situation was developing in Georgetown. The Commissioner had mentioned to me on several occasions that he could deal effectively with a large crowd if they were really fighting, but found it much more difficult to deal with a number of small bands employing hit-and-run tactics. It was with this in mind that I had suggested the deployment of the Army on foot patrols all over the city.

I made it clear that I did not agree with Colonel Pemberton's opinion, which the Commissioner shared, and told them that I would so inform the Governor. Soon after, I saw the Governor and requested him as Commander-in-Chief to bring out the Army forthwith to aid the civil power, but he refused.

At 9.30 a.m. on June 12, I returned to my office where the ministers had gathered for our regular Wednesday morning meeting. The crowds which had assembled along High Street and Brickdam grew larger after I arrived, and at about 10.30 a.m., were all over the streets, they also sat in front of the three gates of the Public Buildings. I learnt later that they had put padlocks on the gates at the Public Buildings. While some were singing songs, others were shouting taunts and threats and generally behaving in a riotous manner. The police used tear-gas on a few occasions but this proved ineffective.

So disorderly had the crowd become at one stage that I called the Governor and asked him to come and observe for himself what was taking place. He indicated to me that he would consult the Commissioner. Soon after he told me that

he did not think it would be wise for him to appear on the scene; instead, he would send his deputy, Desmond Murphy.

Murphy arrived, walked through the crowd, and after climbing over the rails around the Public Buildings and over the heads of some of the squatters, came up to my office, where we had a brief discussion. I told him I had reported to the Commissioner that looting had taken place, but he had replied that he had not received any reports; I further said that unless firm measures were taken to disperse the crowds, grave disorders would occur later. Murphy left, remarking that the Public Buildings were in a state of siege.

After his departure, the crowd became more violent. I called the Commissioner and asked that it be dispersed. He refused stating that if he did so greater trouble would follow.

Meanwhile, my colleagues and I had continued with our meeting. At its conclusion, when we were about to leave, the lock which the squatters had put on the gate had to be broken. At about 1.45 p.m., Senator C. V. Nunes left on foot for his office across High Street. The crowd, which stoned him, then closed in and beat him severely; he reached the Ministerial Buildings after receiving many blows on his back and two cuts on his head.

At that stage, I called the Commissioner and again asked him to disperse the crowd. He refused; all that he was prepared to do even at that stage was to assure me that all the ministers would be given safe conduct out of the Public Buildings. I told him that I was concerned not only about our safety but also that of members of my staff and others who were working. He replied that he would be asking Superintendent Carl Austin to escort me.

In the meantime, the mob had gone into a frenzy. Having assaulted and beaten Nunes with impunity in full view of the police, their audacity overcame them and they lost control. They ran toward the iron railing around the Public Buildings as if to climb over it and began yelling and gesticulating wildly. At this time, the riot squad cleared the gateway and made a passage leading into High Street.

At about 2.30 p.m. I left my office and joined my car. As

denied any political motivation. It claimed that it had called its affiliates out on strike not for political but for industrial reasons; that there had not been adequate consultation and that far-reaching powers which the Bill sought to give the government would have enabled it to muzzle and destroy the "free trade union movement."

The TUC pointed out that it was not opposed to the principle of the Bill; that is, the taking of a poll among workers in any industry or in any bargaining unit to settle jurisdictional disputes between unions and to certify recognition for the purpose of collective bargaining. What it objected to, it said, were the provisions of the Bill which it claimed would put unlimited powers in the hands of the government through the Minister and the Commissioner of Labour.

The fact is there had been consultation. Between the publication of the Bill on March 25 and the debate in the Legislative Assembly on April 17, the Minister of Labour had held talks with the TUC and the employers' association. As a result of these discussions, amendments had been made to 7 of the 13 clauses of the Bill, involving in all, ten basic changes, including the establishment of a Labour Relations Board in place of the *ad hoc* committee of the original Bill. The Minister of Labour had also announced that the government had accepted a further proposal of the TUC that a Labour Code should be enacted which would embrace the whole range of rights, privileges, obligations and duties of the working people and employers.

Further, he had given an assurance that the Labour Code and the Labour Relations Ordinance would become operative at the same time. An announcement had then been made of a committee to draft the Code with a majority of its members drawn from the TUC, the employers' association and the opposition.

On winding up the debate in the Legislative Assembly, I had indicated that discussions would continue with the TUC and that any further proposals accepted by the government would be incorporated in the Bill during its passage through the Senate. On April 18, when discussions were resumed with

we approached the gate, the crowd shouted abuse and threats and moved in a menacing manner. However, we came out of the compound without incident, but as we turned from Brickdam into High Street, the crowd surged forward and directed a shower of bottles and stones at us. Most of them struck the car, but one stone broke the left rear window and struck one of the two policemen, Constable Hussain, on the left jaw, seriously injuring him. At this point, Assistant Commissioner (Crime) Austin, fired his pistol, an action which was followed by my two bodyguards who were flanking me in the rear seat of the car. The stoning continued until we crossed Croal Street.

Constable Hussain's face was lacerated and swollen and he was taken to hospital for treatment. There is no doubt that the police fire foiled the attempt by those opposed to me and the government, who were bent on injuring, if not assassinating me.

The violence and terrorism assumed uglier and even more dangerous proportions. Unruly mobs invaded the Law Courts while in session, and the premises of the United Nations.

A campaign began to dynamite and blow up government offices and other Public Buildings. The Muslim mosque at Anns Grove was blown up. The main public buildings attacked were the following: June 17, Transport and Harbours Department Office; June 20, Campbellville Government School; June 23, Georgetown Ferry Stelling, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Labour, Health and Housing; June 24, Central Housing and Planning Department; June 25, Education Department.

Attempts were also made on June 24, to dynamite the Rice Marketing Board wharf and the Licence Revenue Office, but these were unsuccessful. At the RMB, a large quantity of dynamite was placed under the wharf where 200 workmen were engaged in loading rice on a ship. Had the lighted fuse not been discovered in time, the wharf would have been blown to bits, large stocks of rice destroyed, and the lives of 200 workers endangered.

The strike came to an end on July 6. To the very end, the TUC

the TUC and the Consultative Association of Guyanese Industries, the Minister of Home Affairs repeated this assurance in the Senate stating it was not the intention of the government to proceed with the Labour Relations Bill in the Senate until its discussions with those bodies were concluded. The Minister also pointed out that both of these organizations were informed that they would be fully consulted before the Regulations to be made under the Ordinance were made by the Council of Ministers. These assurances were given on the understanding that the discussions would be held in good faith and with fair and reasonable despatch.

After a measure of agreement had been reached on a number of points, I asked the TUC on April 26, to tabulate its views. Although claiming to have previously submitted memoranda on all the points at issue, it was not until May 4 that it submitted a document dated April 30, entitled "Memorandum by the British Guiana Trades Union Council on a Labour Relations Law for Guiana."

The Council of Ministers considered the memorandum at a special meeting the next day, and agreed to accept many of the new proposals. Other proposals including the composition of the Labour Relations Board and the method of making application to the Board were not accepted as recommended. But there being common points of view between the government and the TUC, the government made further compromise proposals. Thirteen proposals were accepted outright. On the remaining points of difference, the TUC unfortunately showed no sign of compromise and the talks eventually broke down on May 7.

On May 13, still anxious to reach agreement, we proposed that a Committee consisting of representatives of the government, the TUC and CAGI should explore the possibility of finding a way out of the deadlocks on the three main points in dispute. These were: appointments to the Labour Relations Board, the method of securing a poll, and the majority required for certification of a challenging union. After some nine meetings the Committee forwarded to me a letter dated May 23, in which certain recommendations were made and on the

basis of which it was felt full discussions could be resumed.

I met representatives of the TUC and CAGI on May 24 and again on May 27. I told them that the government was prepared to accept the report of the Committee on the clear understanding that there was a tacit acceptance of the position that in the course of consultation over the names of independent members of the Labour Relations Board submitted by TUC and the CAGI, the Minister would not be precluded from suggesting names for consideration by all the parties if the names submitted by the two other parties were unacceptable to the Minister; as an alternative, the government was prepared to enter immediately into consultations with them with the object of discussing names for appointment as independent members.

At this stage I appealed to the TUC to call off the strike, but it refused, stating that there were several other points to be resolved.

It would be seen that we had at all stages been willing to consult with the TUC and the employers' association and to approach the matter in a spirit of compromise. This spirit of compromise however, had been very much lacking on the side of the TUC, because it was acting from political motives. I stated in the legislature on April 19 that its decision to call a strike when discussions were still in progress and the legislative process had not been exhausted could only be regarded as an attempt to coerce the government and to subvert the normal legislative processes.

Incidentally, the TUC's insincere support of the principle of a poll to determine the union to be recognized became patently clear in 1964 when it refused to agree to a poll in the sugar industry to settle the 6-month strike for recognition of the GAWU, rather than the MPCA.

That the strike was politically motivated was admitted by L. F. S. Burnham, when I consulted him on the Bill. When I asked what he objected to in the Bill, which was similar to the one he had supported in the House of Assembly in 1953, he admitted that it was not the *causa belli*, but the *casus belli*, not the cause of, but the occasion for, the war.

Even Nigel Fisher, Junior Minister at the Colonial Office, who visited Guiana in May, admitted that the strike was politically motivated. Just before departing for London, he visited my office and said point-blank: "Cheddi, I am satisfied you have done all you could." That was the impression he had apparently gained at a luncheon at Government House at which the president of CAGI had indicated that I had made all the concessions that were reasonable in the circumstances. (CAGI had been formed to give respectability to big business and to act as a front for the discredited Georgetown Chamber of Commerce.) CAGI was satisfied with the progress of the negotiations in the tripartite meetings of the government, the TUC and the employers which I chaired, and was also at that stage anxious that the strike should be called off.

However, the strike was not called off, it continued even after the Bill had actually lapsed. This occurred after the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, R. B. Gajraj, allowed a Motion for the extension of the emergency to be talked out by the opposition. He allowed every single member of the opposition to speak during the meeting of the Assembly on May 21, disallowed four government Motions of closure, and a few minutes before midnight permitted the last opposition speaker to move an amendment; by that time the members on the government side had spoken for 2 hours and 50 minutes and the members of the opposition for 13 hours and 15 minutes!

This occurred because the Speaker was opposed to the government; he had attacked us outside the legislature on the 1962 budget. I have already cited his brother's advocacy in 1962 of a "business strike" to cripple the government. His hostility at first took a personal note; he opposed the marriage of his daughter, Roshan, to my brother, Derek, and when they were married, refused to attend the wedding.

Gajraj first attacked us indirectly in speeches delivered on August 19, 1962, to the Muslim Youth Organization, and on September 11, to the Muslims at Windsor Forest when he urged them to unite against "the Communists". On May 13, 1963, he attacked the government in the Georgetown Town Council with an outburst all the more serious because it

occurred during a discussion by the Town Council on matters which were before the legislature. The motion before the Town Council was: "That this Council views with concern the present General Strike, the unnecessary declaration of a general emergency, and calls upon Government to withdraw the Labour Relations Bill, 1963, in its present form and revoke the proclamation of an emergency."

In the course of the debate, Councillor Gajraj said: "It is not permitted to me by the tradition of the office I hold to express the viewpoint on any matter which might engage the attention of the Legislative Assembly. But here I sit as the elected representative of one of the wards of the city, and it would be wrong for me, as the representative of those in that ward, to sit silent here this morning when so important a matter is brought before the Council.

"I want to say at the outset that I fully endorse the motion that has been moved . . .

"For, although it started with the objections of the iniquitous intentions that were so cleverly hidden in the words which were put in certain clauses of the Labour Relations Bill, nevertheless, in trying to find a means to remove the threats to the liberty of the citizen, we have been able to see how much deeper is the cause that motivates every single bit of legislation that would seem to have been put forward for consideration over the last one and a half years."

So incensed were a few of us at the Speaker's ruling on the debate on the Motion for the extension of the emergency that we verbally accosted him in the lobby after the adjournment.

As a result he "named" Victor Downer, Mohamed Saffee and Derek Jagan and me, and suspended us "from service of the Assembly" after we refused to apologize. We were thus robbed of our majority in the House. The only way to resolve this deadlock was to prorogue the legislature. This caused the Bill to lapse.

One would have thought that the lapsing of the Bill would have brought an end to the strike. But this was not to be. The organizers then began to raise side issues: firstly, an undertaking from the government that the Bill would not be brought

back; secondly, payment for the period while on strike. These demands I rejected absolutely. To help resolve the deadlock, the British TUC decided to send Frank Cousins of the Transport and General Workers' Union. However, on the eve of his departure he fell ill as he was about to board his aircraft, and his place was taken by Robert Willis, Secretary of the Typographical Workers' Union.

Willis did some hard bargaining and eventually I agreed not to bring back the Labour Relations Bill in the form presented and in any case not before four months had elapsed. On the question of payment of the strikers, I agreed to make an advance equivalent to two weeks' pay as a loan to be repaid over a period of six months.

The TUC, however, was still not prepared to accept these concessions; the American, Howard McCabe, instigated the continuation of the strike, contrary to the advice of the resident British TUC representative, Walter Hood. In the end, Willis threatened to return to London, expose the TUC and shut off its funds from ICFTU sources. Later, as he put it, "Jagan made all the concessions that could have been made, but the TUC wanted to lead him in the streets with a dog chain and to have his head on a platter." Faced with this ultimatum, the TUC came to its senses and brought the strike to an end.

Observers abroad have found it difficult to understand why the PPP was opposed by the trade-union movement. The answer is somewhat complex.

Firstly, the TUC does not really speak for the working class. Its superstructure is unrepresentative and does not truly reflect the wishes and aspirations of the rank and file. If this were not so, the strike not only would have been termed "general" but also would have been so in fact. In reality, of the 52,000 workers claimed by the TUC, only about half went on strike. Many essential services — electricity, water, ferry, hospitals — were maintained in spite of the "general" strike; the industries mainly affected were bauxite and manganese. More than 90 per cent of the sugar workers did not strike. These workers were and still are represented through pressure of one kind or another by the MPCA, whose president, Richard Ishmael, was

also the president of the Trades Union Council in 1962 and 1963; R. D. Persaud, also of the MPCA, has been president since 1964. This is so because of the large number of delegates accorded the MPCA by virtue of its false claim to being the biggest union with about 20,000 workers; at the Annual Congress of the TUC, the MPCA is allowed nearly 30 per cent of the total number of delegates.

Secondly, the TUC's leadership is drawn mainly from civil servants, teachers and other employees in government and private industry, the majority of whom have been nurtured by colonialism and have developed a "middle-class", conservative and opportunistic outlook and mentality. And it is completely under U.S. reactionary control.

The question might well be asked, what accounted for the changed attitude to the Labour Relations Bill by the TUC leadership and Burnham in 1963, as compared with that in 1953, a decade earlier? Firstly, a poll would have ended the power of the MPCA in the sugar industry and elsewhere by the election of trade union leaders who were sympathetic with the aims and objectives of the People's Progressive Party. Secondly, the strike was the only means of forestalling independence and of putting back into power reactionary and opportunistic politicians. Burnham, after losing two successive elections, saw no other way to satisfy his personal ambitions. Thirdly, the poll would have removed the bureaucratic TUC leadership and the reactionary U.S. influence on the trade-union movement.

The violence and disturbances of 1962 and 1963 did not succeed in their immediate objective of bringing about the fall of the government or the suspension of the constitution. But they did result, as we shall see, in the delay of independence and the imposition of a constitutional and electoral formula designed to bring the opposition to power. It was a major tragedy for Guyana that a section of the working class was deluded into forging its own chains by directing its attacks not, as previously, against the capitalists and landlords but against a national, pro-working class, socialist-oriented government.