Chapter VII

Suspension of the Constitution

> In its laboriously prepared charge sheet the British Government has not been able to point to a single act of violence on the part of any member of the People's Progressive Party . . . The people of this country who remember how, not long ago, the leaders of the national movement were denounced by the British Government as Japanese agents, know what to make of these charges.
>
> *The Times of India*

Friday, October 9, 1953 will always be remembered as Black Friday. That was the day which ended the 133 days of the PPP in office under the Waddington Constitution.

Before that fateful day, there had been many "behind-the-scene" activities. On Sunday, October 4, the British Home Secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, the Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, and Sir Sydney Abrahams, Senior Legal Assistant to the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Colonial Office, flew to Dyce Airport. From there they went by car to Balmoral Castle for an interview with the Queen. On their return, the Home Secretary told newsmen that there was no special significance in the visit, that it was a normal visit of members of the Privy Council!

There was also great secrecy about the movement of warships and troops. The frigates *Bigbury Bay* and *Burghead Bay* steamed in the direction of Guiana; according to the War Office, they were going to the West Indies. The cruiser *Superb* left Jamaica with 500 troops; the 9,000-ton cruiser *Sheffield* and the aircraft-carrier *Implacable* were alerted, the latter diverting from its NATO exercise. To "hush-hush" the whole affair,

an Admiralty spokesman said that the *Implacable* was going to Devonport and the movement of the warships in the West Indies had nothing to do with trouble in Guiana and was only a normal station move that had been planned months before.

On Thursday, October 6, while the battleships were heading towards Guiana, the Colonial Office issued the following statement:

It has been evident that the intrigues of Communists and their associates, some in Ministerial posts, threaten the welfare and good administration of the colony. If these processes were to continue unchecked an attempt might be made by methods which are familiar to some other parts of the world to set up a Communist-dominated state. This would lead to bloodshed.

In view of the latest developments, Her Majesty's Government have felt it necessary to send naval and military forces to Georgetown (capital of British Guiana) with the utmost despatch, in order to preserve peace and the safety of all classes. Any reinforcements that may be necessary will be sent from the United Kingdom.

From Tuesday to Friday, Georgetown was a sea of excitement; everyone was on tenterhooks. On Friday, October 9, the position was clarified. That was when the hammer fell. The Chief Secretary, John Gutch, spoke on the radio and read a statement put out by the British government. He said:

Her Majesty's Government has decided that the Constitution of British Guiana must be suspended to prevent Communist subversion of the Government and a dangerous crisis both in public order and in economic affairs . . . The faction in power have shown by their acts and their speeches that they are prepared to go to any lengths, including violence, to turn British Guiana into a Communist state. The Governor has therefore been given emergency powers and has removed the portfolios of the Party Ministers. Armed forces have landed to support the police and to prevent any public disorder which might be fomented by Communist supporters.

This was the same person who, on October 4, had spoken by telephone to a *Sunday Dispatch* reporter in London. The

reporter wrote: "I spoke over the radio-telephone yesterday to Mr. John Gutch, acting Colonial Secretary, in Georgetown, Guiana. 'There is still unrest on some sugar estates,' he said, 'but we have not asked for a cruiser to be sent'."

The "Red" plot was built on false charges and a great many "ifs" and "buts". One of the main stories circulated was that we had worked out a fire plot to burn down the city of Georgetown. Lyttelton said that this was disclosed by police agents to the Governor on October 7, 1953. This, in fact, was three days after a decree was signed by the Queen suspending the Constitution.

Obviously, troops were sent not because of any disorder, violence, shooting or killing, but to crush any popular demonstration which was expected to occur as a result of the suspension of the Constitution. Ralph Champion, *Daily Mirror* correspondent, who was the first to arrive in British Guiana during the crisis, wrote on Wednesday, October 7, from Georgetown:

I was the first British newspaperman to arrive in this "crisis" colony and when I flew in yesterday, I was greeted with amazement. There seemed to be little idea that there was a crisis over alleged moves by the government's People's Progressive Party to convert the colony into a Red Republic.

Another British newspaper, the *Daily Mail* on October 7, reported:

Mr. Whittingham, the deputy police commissioner in British Guiana, sounded calm and unperturbed today as he spoke over the radio-telephone from the colony's capital, Georgetown, and said: "There are no demonstrations, there is no general strike, there is nothing abnormal happening here whatsoever."

I told him of reports that Communist workers were demonstrating around the Parliament buildings in Georgetown. Mr. Whittingham said: "There have been no demonstrations and no trouble whatsoever."

The British government built up its case on other suppositions and distortions of fact. To add an air of intrigue and mystery, the Colonial Secretary of British Honduras, Thomas

Vickers, declared that there was a definite "link" between us, the Guatemalan Communist and the British Honduras opposition elements. And Lyttelton added some bloodcurdling details. The Ministers of Education and Labour, he said, had started an "African and Colonial Affairs Committee which declared support for the Mau Mau in Kenya and the Communist terrorists in Malaya and specialized in vicious anti-British, anti-white propaganda."

He quoted the Minister of Education, L. F. S. Burnham, as having said in a speech in the House of Assembly on September 11: "So far as I am concerned, we shall continue to wear proudly the description seditious or the avocation terrorists."

But even conservative opinion in Britain did not easily swallow the excuses given by the British government. *The Times* wrote:

> Thoughtful observers feel that unless the show of force is justified by the subsequent revelation of an imminent plot it might well alienate public opinion.

The *Observer* of October 11 attacked the British government for "serious blunders" and "serious mistakes". Faced with these criticisms the British government published a White Paper on the suspension of the Constitution. But even this did not provide any further evidence.

The Times of October 21 commented:

> The "Communist plot" . . . is not exposed in the White Paper with the clarity and completeness that many in the country expected.

Mounting criticisms forced the British government to a debate. Labour opinion spoke in strong terms about "gunboat democracy" and demanded that "the Government must prove its charges". James Griffiths, former Labour Colonial Secretary, speaking at Portsmouth, demanded specific evidence. He said: "It is for the Government to satisfy Parliament and the nation that this fear is well founded, not by vague and general allegations, but by evidence set out in specific terms."

The debate was fixed for October 22. Our party leadership

decided that Burnham and I should go to London to brief the opposition and put our case to the British public. The British government could not very well prevent our departure, however much it would have liked to, because the opposition, which included John Dare, president of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, and leading members of the National Democratic Party such as John Carter, Lionel Luckhoo, John Fernandes and Rudy Kendall, was proceeding to London to support the British government.

We were free to leave. But freedom to leave was one thing; being able to get there was another. We soon found out that everything was done to conspire against our leaving the country. The governments of Trinidad, Barbados, Jamaica and the United States indicated that we would not be allowed to pass (in transit) through their territories. In view of this, the United States (Pan American), French and British airlines refused to book us. The Dutch airline (KLM) was prepared to take us but its direct flight from British Guiana meant an overnight stop in Surinam. This, the Surinam government was not prepared to grant; it would give only an in transit permit. We were thus forced to charter on October 19, 1953, a local D.C.3 plane to Surinam at the almost prohibitive cost of $800 just for the two of us.

Our backdoor entry to London was delayed by bad weather and fog. We could not land at Frankfurt because of poor visibility, but the warm reception we received, particularly from students at airports in Holland, France and England, compensated for this delay; Guiana had hit the headlines, and many were willing to demonstrate their support against the British government's action.

We arrived in London just in time for the House of Commons debate. We were rushed directly from the airport to a meeting with the leading personalities of the Parliamentary Labour Party. This proved, as one newspaper commented the following day, to be more like an inquisition than a briefing session among friends interested in the same objectives and the cause of labour.

After this meeting, we proceeded to the House of Commons

and took our seats in the distinguished visitors' gallery. Oliver Lyttelton, then Colonial Secretary, was the government's opening spokesman. At 3.55 p.m. on October 22, 1953, he moved "that this House approve the action of Her Majesty's Government in British Guiana."

The ground had been well prepared for Lyttelton. The national dailies had attacked us viciously. Some of the more sensational and hysterical headlines were:

Daily Mirror, October 5: "Janet Britain-hater — hatred of Britain is main spring that makes Mrs. Jagan tick."

Daily Mail, October 7: "Plot to seize British Guiana, navy speeding troops."

News Chronicle, October 7: "Guiana plot exposed, armed forces sent to avert red-styled coup."

Daily-Express, October 6: "British homes stack guns. Governor booed, mobs stone chief anti-Communist M. P., wives told, quit plantations."

On the day before the debate, the headlines were even more sensational. On October 21, the *Daily Herald* said: "Jagan men had plot to set capital on fire." *Daily Express*: "Jagans aped Mau terror." *Daily Mail*: "Guiana fire-bug plots exposed."

Lyttelton expressed his regret at the necessity of having to send troops to British Guiana and to suspend the constitution. The decision was, he said, "a setback to the principle upon which all parties in this House are agreed; namely, that our colonial policy should be directed towards giving the peoples in the Colonial Territories an increasing responsibility for the management of their own affairs. But if it be true — and it is true — that in all parts of the House we are firmly and finally committed to this policy, we must be prepared to take risks in carrying it out." He then cleverly sought to win over or neutralize the opposition by appealing to their fears and sympathies. He spoke strongly about our alleged Communist connections, how some of us had gone behind the "Iron Curtain" to Youth Festivals and to trade union, peace and women's conferences. "Her Majesty's Government is not willing," he declared, "to allow a communist state to be organized within the British Commonwealth." He then posed two questions: "If the Labour

Government had been in power, would the Labour Party have strengthened the police by transferring troops from Jamaica to Georgetown to ensure law and order?" Secondly, "Would they have kept the PPP Ministers in office?"

He then read telegrams from friends of the Labour Party —Grantley Adams, Alexander Bustamante, Norman Manley and Rita Hinden. Grantley Adams of Barbados had cabled: "Our experience of Jagan and his sympathizers leads us to feel certain that social and economic progress in the British West Indies is much more likely to be harmed by that sort of person than by the most reactionary. However much we must regret suspension of the constitution, we should deplore far more the continuance of a government that put Communist ideology before the good of the people." Alexander Bustamante, the Chief Minister of Jamaica had dispatched: "If British Guiana were fighting for complete self-government within the democratic nations I would have stood beside British Guiana, but British Guiana today can get no sympathy from me — can get no sympathy from the free thinking [*sic*] world. I am sorry for the people there. I am not sorry for the leaders. They are not leaders at all. They do not know what they are doing." Norman Manley, leader of the Jamaica opposition said: "It was a betrayal of the cause of colonial peoples the world over, and a reckless and stupid betrayal of those who voted for them."

Rita Hinden was then closely associated with both the Fabian Colonial Bureau and the former Colonial Secretary, Arthur Creech-Jones, and was regarded in Labour Party circles as an expert on colonial affairs. From her, Lyttelton told the House, he had gathered that our interpretation of democracy was what she "could only describe as a one party rule." This outburst was perhaps due to the treatment she had received at a London meeting in October 1951, sponsored by the Caribbean Labour Congress (London Branch), when both she and I had spoken on the British Guiana Constitution, which she had helped to write. She had been booed by those who were present — for her a new experience for which she probably has never forgiven me. I had exposed her by quoting from her own writings; she had previously written that any socialist who

failed to satisfy to the full the aspirations of the colonial peoples should be "treated as an imperialist scoundrel."

Lyttelton also read out telegrams which he had received from two organizations at home — the League of Coloured People and the British Guiana Village Chairmen's Conference. The telegram from the latter said: British Guiana Village Chairmen's Conference representing unions of local authorities in rural areas, regrets setback to Colony constitutionally, but pledge full support to His Excellency the Governor and interim administration. Conference welcomes arrival armed forces Her Majesty's Government and considered this step necessary to preserve law and order. Conference further takes this opportunity to affirm unqualified loyalty and allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen.

The telegram sent by the British Guiana League of Coloured People read: I am instructed by my executive to convey to you our sense of appreciation of Your Excellency's timely action in safeguarding the peace and welfare of this land of ours. As the premier organization representing peoples of African descent in the community, I am also to reaffirm our unswerving loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and pledge our unstinted support and cooperation in your efforts to bring normality back to this Colony.

Lyttelton scored many debating points. He quoted from these telegrams because they supported him in suspending the constitution. How were the opposition and the British public to know of the difference between the League of Coloured People at home and the parent body in London, that the former was reactionary while the latter was progressive, identifying itself with the cause of all Coloured people against white discrimination and colonial domination? How was the British public to know that the Village Chairmen's Conference was a reactionary body elected on the basis of a limited suffrage, a body opposed to the introduction of universal adult suffrage, and to the abolition of fully nominated country districts and of nominated seats in partially elected village councils?

Clement Attlee and James Griffiths were the principal opposition speakers. They reflected the thinking of the Labour

Party and did not really join issue with Lyttelton. Indeed, they aligned themselves with the latter, who had delved into their armoury and used their special weapon — anti-Communism. After lecturing us about missing a great opportunity, Griffiths declared:

> We condemn your policies, we condemn the methods you employed. We deplore the actions you took and the speeches you made. Beyond everything, speaking for myself, I think you missed a great opportunity of doing real work for your people and of building a foundation for a future democratic state in Guiana.

John Hynd, Labour M.P., whom I had fully briefed, put the issue in proper perspective. He remarked:

> The White Paper superficially sounds very sinister. So did the Zinoviev letter, so did the Post Office Savings Bank scare and also the charges in 1945 about the Labour Party intending to set up a Gestapo. The charges against Harold Laski sound very familiar when one reads the White Paper. We know very well about capitalist boycotts of a progressive government and all that kind of thing. That makes us hesitant to accept some of the allegations in this White Paper.

A few of the left-wing Labour members who were prepared to do real battle on our behalf could not catch the Speaker's eye! In the end the Labour Party moved what was described by *Tribune* as a tepid amendment. It said that the House:

> While emphatically deploring the actions and speeches of some of the leaders of the People's Progressive Party in British Guiana, as set forth in the White Paper, and condemning methods tending to the establishment of a totalitarian regime in a British Colony, nevertheless is not satisfied that the situation in British Guiana was of such a character as to justify the extreme step of suspending the Constitution.

When put to the vote, this was lost with 256 votes for and 294 against. Lyttelton's tactics had won the day.

That the Labour Party had no intention of putting up a vigorous fight against the British government became clear a few days after the debate. We had decided to put our case to the British public and planned a series of meetings throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. Organizations willing to sponsor us were Peace Committees, the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism, the Student Labour Federation (an independent left-wing body), and the Fabian Colonial Bureau. The Labour Party, to which we appealed for help, not only rebuffed us but blacklisted us; it threatened its affiliates with proscription if they associated with us.

In recommending its ban, the Labour Party issued a statement which said that "instead of pursuing a policy of social reform and seeking to justify the faith placed in them by the electorate, the leaders of the PPP pursued a Communist policy and created a situation which necessitated the movement of troops to ensure the maintenance of law and order."

I have already referred in the last chapter to the programme of reforms which we had embarked upon. Many of these had been taken or adapted from the laws, usage and practices in Western countries. Our Labour Relations Bill was patterned after the National Labour Relations Act, popularly known as the Wagner Act, enacted in the United States in the 1930s against strong opposition from big business. In our attempts to get the sugar producers to release some of their idle land holdings, we had talked about land reform in Bolivia, Czechoslovakia and Guatemala. We had given wide publicity to the Puerto Rican Foraker Act of 1900 which limited ownership by individuals and companies to not more than 500 acres of land. In the field of local government, we were simply putting into practice what prevailed in the United Kingdom. But, apparently, what was acceptable in the West was not to be tolerated in Guiana; what was deemed democratic in the United States and its possessions was considered dictatorial in British Guiana.

By colonial planter standards, our programme was no doubt revolutionary. But unbiased observers did not see anything wrong or wicked in what we were doing. The liberal U.S.

weekly magazine, the *Nation*, wrote on November 28:

The measures planned were not Socialist, let alone Communist, in essence. Its planned labour legislation was derived from the Wagner Act. Under the system to be set up, inquiries and polls could be held in any industry to decide on the union to be officially recognized. The inquiries and polls were to be conducted by a British official.

What is more, a new union challenging the position of an established bargaining agent would have to get 65 per cent of the workers' votes before it could be recognized.

It was under these conditions that the PPP-supported union, the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union, hoped to replace the existing Man-Power Citizens' Association as the official organization in sugar and elsewhere.

The British Trades Union Congress criticised us for pursuing a Communist policy and maintaining "contacts behind the Iron Curtain, with the World Federation of Trade Unions rather than the Trades Union Congress and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions." It added that "to this end the People's Progressive Party through its Ministers had also consistently endeavoured to destroy the Man-Power Citizens' Association, the only existing trade union organization with a collective bargaining agreements, and which provides for the establishment of joint negotiating machinery, which has resulted in a considerable improvement in the conditions of sugar workers." The statement continued: "Failing by strikes and intimidation to gain its end, i.e. the recognition of the Guiana Industrial Workers' Union, the People's Progressive Party sought to accomplish their aim by legislative action, which would have placed in the hands of Ministers, who at the same time were leaders of unions in opposition to the Man-Power Citizens' Association, which is affiliated to the ICFTU, powers which would have enabled them to achieve their industrial objective and at the same time ensure the subservience of the trade union movement to the People's Progressive Party."

Our greatest crime, apparently, was that we did not support the MPCA which the British TUC was supporting through the

International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. What the workers wanted and what was in their interest did not seem to matter to the British TUC. The sugar workers had clearly demonstrated in prolonged strikes between 1948 and 1953 and at the general election that they had no confidence in the company-dominated MPCA. Writing about this union in *Tribune*, Ian Mikardo, left-wing Labour M.P., stated:

I have before me as I write, a journal called *The Labour Advocate*, which describes itself as the "Official organ of the Man-Power Citizens' Association." It is the issue dated October 18, 1953 and it is the first number published after the suspension of the Constitution of British Guiana.

The main article in this paper is a straightforward defence of two things — of capitalism in general and colonial employers in particular.

Nowhere in the paper is there any reference to the low wages and unspeakable living conditions of the workers of British Guiana. To read it you would believe that the members of the Man-Power Citizens' Association enjoy high wages and ideal conditions provided by the most generous and beneficent employers one could imagine. Capitalism is described as a "dynamic, expanding system" and as a "bold and imaginative society". The article pays a series of warm tributes to the employers. It even gives them credit for the abolition of slavery (which in fact, they fiercely opposed), establishing industrial safety (which, in fact, they haven't cared two pence about) and for "nearly abolishing" woman and child labour (which, in fact, they have struggled to retain) . . .

Yet it is this Man-Power Citizens' Association, this obvious goose club, which British trade unionists are being told by their leaders to support.

There were many in the labour movement who were tired of the subservient attitude of the Labour Party and the TUC; they openly defied the ban imposed on us.

Aneurin Bevan and his wife, Jennie Lee, showed their defiance by entertaining us at a cocktail party at their home in London. Ian Mikardo and I spoke to his constituents in

Reading. Several other individual party leaders and members spoke on our platform. Councillor Andrew Wood chaired one of my meetings and thundered: "I still have a lot of fight left in me."

These labour stalwarts were ashamed of their "socialist" party. They had remembered that at the beginning of the crisis Morgan Phillips, secretary of the Labour Party, had said at a meeting in Gloucester: "If clear evidence of a plot is not forthcoming the action which has been taken may call into question Britain's good faith towards development of self-government in the colonies."

Lyttelton had not exposed any plot. A few days after the debate in the House of Commons, the *Economist* had to admit that "the White Paper has not cleared up many people's doubts." And even our most bitter and persistent critic, the editor of the Georgetown *Daily Argosy*, a wartime security officer, knew "of no organized plan for such a revolt . . ." He said in an editorial on October 11: "What the PPP leaders were aiming at (and all the evidence points that way) was a political and constitutional crisis, in the hope of going back to the country and returning with a renewed mandate that might with difficulty be questioned."

If there was "no organized plan", what was the real cause of our removal from office? Some say it was "king" sugar. I do not think that was the main factor. For, at the time the troops were dispatched, Mr. (now Baron) Jock Campbell, chairman of Bookers, was reported to have said that he had seen no reason for excitement and no necessity for sending troops, and so far as he was concerned the crisis had already passed. By the crisis, he meant the strike which had come to an end on September 24, 1953.

Some have argued that in trying to achieve our objectives we had done things which aroused fears and apprehensions. The strike of sugar workers, it was said, which started prior to the suspension of the constitution on August 31, 1953, and ended on September 24, was unnecessary, as its main purpose, recognition, could have been achieved without calling a strike by moving straight ahead to the enactment of the Labour

Relations Bill. This course was taken perhaps because Dr. Lachhmansingh, president of the GIWU and his executive had felt that opposition to the Bill would have been intense and the sugar planters would have either recognized the union or been more receptive to the Bill after they had felt the combined strength of the workers. It is important to note, in view of subsequent developments in 1963 and 1964 on the same question of recognition, that practically the whole trade union movement was in support of the GIWU's claim for recognition. The British Guiana Labour Union, the Sawmill and Forest Workers' Union and all the main unions in the Federation of Unions of Government Employees, with the exception of the official leadership of the Transport Workers' Union, had come out in a 24-hour sympathy strike on September 22, 1953.

Another factor which aroused some apprehension and caused irrational anti-white feelings was Burnham's tactics during the Van Sertima by-election campaign. Frank Van Sertima, who was a successful PPP candidate in the North Georgetown constituency, had been unseated in an election petition. Ignoring the party hierarchy and machinery, Burnham took command of the campaign and used tactics similar to those he had used in the general election campaign in Georgetown — he fixed meetings about a block away from our opponents and kept away as speakers, the more ideologically developed party leaders (Sydney King, Martin Carter, Rory Westmaas, Fred Bowman, Eric Huntley) who had taken my side during "crisis week". His tactics were clear. Having lost by democratic procedure at the 1953 Congress and having failed with his ultimatum of "leader or nothing", he sought to build up areas of support on a racial basis and by bypassing the party's organization. This campaign roused fears in the ranks of the opposition, particularly among European members of the community. Indeed, there was some talk among them of plans to evacuate to the U.S. Air Base, in Atkinson Field.

There was also a change in attitude of the workers. Suppressed, oppressed and exploited for many years, they were elated at their newly won victory. They were no longer prepared to submit humbly to the old pattern of a life of ease for

others at their expense. Their behaviour perhaps took on an exaggerated form, expressing, no doubt, an overcompensation for the many long years of economic exploitation and cultural and emotional suppression. "You have got too big for your boots," many housewives were overheard to have said to their now "bumptious" servants.

However, the main cause, I believe, for the suspension of our constitution was pressure from the government of the United States.

British Guiana began to attract increasing attention in the United States immediately after our unexpected victory at the 1953 general election. *Time* magazine referred to our government as the first Communist government being set up in the British Empire. And Drew Pearson, the U.S. syndicated columnist, referred to Guiana in somewhat hysterical tones, remarking that while the United States was trying to preserve democracy and freedom in the Far East, Korea and elsewhere, it was allowing a Communist government to be established at its backdoor. The *Washington Post*, noting that our election victory had caused alarm in the United States, said that it was necessary to deprive us of our limited rights and suggested the re-establishment of an old-style colonial authoritarian type of rule under the Governor.

United States official opinion was also roused for reasons connected with our strategic raw material, bauxite, to which I have already referred. The United States was, and still is today, dependent on high-grade ore from Surinam and British Guiana for "sweetening" low-grade locally produced and imported ore.

Apart from bauxite, Guiana was considered a potential source of other valuable minerals. In the postwar period, it was one of the main suppliers of columbite-tantalite ore, the raw material for the production of the high-heat-resisting metal used for the manufacture of jet bombers. There were also distinct indications of oil, radioactive thorium and copper. Manganese is now being mined by a subsidiary of a U.S. corporation, Union Carbide. About our iron ore, the *Church Times* in its comments on October 16, 1953, wrote:

Iron ore deposits covering 75 square miles have been discovered in Venezuela, near the British Guiana border. On the British Guiana side of the frontier, iron ore deposits have also been discovered which may well be a continuation of those in Venezuela. They are claimed to be the biggest in the world.

The frontier between British Guiana and Venezuela, moreover, in the region where the new iron ore deposits have been discovered, is in dispute. This is one reason for the American interest in the deterioration of the situation.

Our strategic importance was noted by Mr. Jackson, a visiting U.S. Congressman and house guest of the Governor about a month before our removal from office. On his departure, he observed that Guiana was within the strategic zone of the United States.

We were not surprised, therefore, that the U.S. government quickly gave its blessing to the British gunboat action. To Henry Byroade, an assistant U.S. Secretary of State, fell the task of laying down the policy. Commenting on this *The Times* of November 2, 1953, wrote: "It is significant that it should have been an American spokesman who on Saturday felt compelled to issue a warning against the hasty shedding of their responsibilities by the Imperial powers . . . Mr. Henry Byroade, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern & Asian and African Affairs, while declaring that his country will use its influence to help colonial peoples towards self-government — thereby in most cases seconding the efforts to which the suzerain powers are pledged — adds a clear declaration of the perils of 'premature' independence."

Ostensibly, the United States was urging the colonial powers to grant independence to colonial territories. But in reality, this independence was nothing more than the nominal transfer of powers to those who either conformed or showed signs of conforming to U.S. policies. Our constitution was suspended because we were not prepared to conform. U.S. foreign policy had begun to take a more reactionary turn just before the end of the Second World War when Harry Truman succeeded Franklin D. Roosevelt as President. Truman, a southern poor white, a "machine" politician and "frontman" for Wall Street

big business and reaction, abandoned the great wartime role played by Roosevelt as mediator between Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. He became an active ally of the latter and was ready to begin the cold war soon after he had taken office.

In this cold war drive, Truman had the support of Winston Churchill. These two political leaders saw the world in terms of what was good or bad for Wall Street and the "City" of London. They jettisoned the "Roosevelt approach" to foreign policy for a "get tough" policy toward the Soviet Union. Communism had gone too far; Communism must be contained; Communism must be destroyed; Eastern Europe must be liberated — this was the thinking of these cold war strategists.

During the war, democracy had implied the inclusion of Communism and the Soviet Union and the exclusion of fascism. In the cold war period, the enemy was no longer fascism; fascism became an ally; Communism was now the only common enemy. A-bomb diplomacy, the "Big Stick" and isolation of the U.S.S.R. became the main weapons in defence of colonialism and imperialism.

Truman was determined to quit "babying" the Soviets. Since the London Foreign Ministers Conference in September 1945, he had decided that the way to peace and security was not through "a continued policy of appeasement and official treatment of Russia as a government friendly to the United States." On October 27, 1945, he made a speech in which he set out the underlying principles of United States foreign policy which he said was based on "righteousness and justice." There would be no "compromise with evil", he said. "We shall refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power" — a clear warning and indication of Truman's attitude to the U.S.S.R. as regards its position in Eastern Europe. The United States, he announced, intended to keep in its own hands the secrets of the manufacture of the atom bomb as a "sacred trust". And all Western Hemisphere problems were to be solved "without interference from outside the Western Hemisphere."

In March 1947, almost a year after Winston Churchill's cold war speech at Fulton, Missouri, Truman redeclared the cold war.

At Baylor University on March 6, he made a speech on foreign economic policy which clearly stated that governments which conducted planned economies and controlled foreign trade were dangers to freedom, that freedom of speech and worship were dependent on the free enterprise system. He pointed out that controlled economies were "not the American way" and "not the way of peace". He urged that "the whole world should adopt the American system" and that "the American system could survive in America only if it became a World system." Calling for action, he implored: "Unless we act and act decisively, it (government-controlled economy and government-controlled foreign trade) will be the pattern of the next century . . . if this trend is not reversed, the Government of the United States will be under pressure, sooner or later, to use these same devices to fight for markets and for raw materials."

On March 12, 1947, the Truman Doctrine was announced in a message to a joint session of both Houses of Congress. Requesting support for Greece, which the bankrupt British government was handing over to the United States, and Turkey, he attacked the Communists, "a military minority", for creating political chaos and urged that if the United States were to realize its objectives, it must be "willing to help free people to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes." He proposed that "it must be the policy of the U.S. to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure."

In this statement the United States government gave a warning to the world that it would, contrary to its own traditions, prevent by whatever means at its disposal, national and social revolutions; become the international policeman in defence of the old order and the maintenance of the *status quo*; arm and militarize West Germany; encircle the Soviet Union to prevent it from influencing revolutionary movements in other countries. The policy of *cordon sanitaire*, of containment of Communism, was born.

It was in this cold war atmosphere that the suspension of our constitution and the ejection from office of our popularly

elected PPP government took place in October 1953. By this time, when the U.S.S.R. had already developed the A-bomb and the H-bomb, Churchill, the realist, unlike the fear-ridden Americans, knew that it was no longer a practical proposition to "liberate" Eastern Europe. On May 11, 1953, he declared that "Russia has a right to feel assured as far as human arrangements can reach that the terrible events of the Hitler invasion will never be repeated and that Poland will remain a friendly power and a buffer." To the credit of this arch-imperialist, it must be said that in a speech to the Germans at Aachen in May, 1956, he said: "In a true unity of Europe, Russia must have her part . . . We must realize how deep and sincere are Russia's anxieties about the safety of her homeland from foreign invasion."

But what Churchill the pragmatist was prepared to adopt as an attitude in the case of Russia, Churchill the empire-defender and capitalist-upholder was unwilling to apply to Guiana. An accommodation with the U.S.S.R. was now urgent; it was by now a real giant. On the other hand, for Britain and the U.S.A. Guiana was not only the only colonial outpost on the South American continent but also on the edge of the strategic Caribbean "lake", "the gateway to the United States of America".

Some of our opponents at home and abroad could not defend the gunboat action of the Tory government. But they sought justification in the attack which had been launched against us by the British Labour Party and Trades Union Congress and shouted with glee that the PPP was condemned even in labour and socialist circles.

How progressive and socialist is the Labour Party of Britain? What role did it play in the cold war? Why did the Labour Party and the TUC attack us? Why did West Indian leaders jump on the anti-Communist bandwagon against us? The reason was that Labour had made us the victim of its own guilt complex. We had become sadly disillusioned about the Labour Party and had said so often and loudly.

In 1948, when police killed five workers and injured several others at Plantation Enmore in Guiana, and when striking coalminers were shot at the Enugu colliery in Nigeria, the

Labour government justified these actions.

In the British Caribbean, a few weak steps had been taken by the Labour government on the question of self-government. Dr. Patrick Solomon and Victor Bryan of Trinidad, who had been militantly socialist in the mid-forties, had attacked Arthur Creech-Jones, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, for not honouring his promise of support for their minority constitutional proposals. The Colonial Secretary had also been attacked for failing to accept the proposals for constitutional reform which had been put forward by the Caribbean Labour Congress for the Leeward-Windward Islands

In 1947, in spite of our objections, Creech-Jones agreed to the nomination of a defeated candidate, Frederick Seaford, to the Legislative Council. And Creech-Jones's successor, James Griffiths, had recommended proposals which, in our opinion, had been more retrograde than those suggested earlier by the right-of-centre Waddington Constitutional Commission. In 1951, that body recommended an Executive Council of 3 *ex officio*, 1 nominated and 6 elected ministers, the selection of the 6 elected ministers to be made by only the 24 elected members of the Legislative Assembly. The Labour Colonial Secretary proposed the reduction of the number of elected ministers from 6 to 5 and the granting of the right of selecting the elected ministers to the 3 *ex officio* government members as well. We raised strong objections to this, knowing from past experience what Government House manoeuvrings and pressure from "sugar" could do with a divided elected bloc. Fortunately, a Tory Colonial Secretary upheld the recommendations of the Commission and our party's decisive victory of 18 out of 24 seats prevented backdoor deals by backbenchers

As we saw it, the Labour Government had committed itself to the cold war policies of the Truman-Churchill axis and had pursued a foreign and colonial policy no different from that of the Tories. This was why Churchill could say on March 20, 1950, in the House of Commons, "In all the main issues of foreign policy, the opposition (i.e. the Tories) in the late Parliament, supported, sustained, and even pointed the course which Bevin (Labour Foreign Secretary) has pursued."

And earlier, on February 13, 1948, General George C. Marshall, Secretary of State, commenting on the British government's acceptance of U.S. proposals, said: "On the recent proposals of Mr. Bevin, they have passed beyond agreement for economic cooperation to the constitution of a Western European Union. This development has been our greatest hope."

At home the Labour government, despite its overwhelming mandate for change, had failed to carry out a bold socialist programme of nationalization of the vital sectors of the economy and to place even the few enterprises nationalized under workers' control.

In the colonies, "defence of Empire" had been the answer to calls for colonial freedom. Herbert Morrison, in 1946, declared: "We are great friends of the jolly old Empire and we are going to stick to it." Ernest Bevin became a true-blue defender of the faith. In a House of Commons speech in 1946, he said: "I know that if the British Empire fell it would mean the standard of life of our constituents would fall considerably." This was no different from the statement of Churchill in 1929 that the high standard of living of the British people had been based on the income from foreign investments and commissions from services rendered to foreign countries. No wonder Bevin was dubbed a "Labour Churchill". The late John Strachey, Labour Minister of Food, put it very bluntly when, in moving the third reading of the Overseas Resources Development Bill on January 20, 1948, he said: "Our national position is really too grave to warrant any indulgence in our particular opinion on the methods of overseas development. By one means or another, by hook or by crook, the development of primary production of all sorts in the colonial territories and dependent areas in the Commonwealth in far more abundant quantities than exist today, is, it is hardly too much to say, a matter of life or death for the economy of this country."

Labour's defence of the Empire meant the maintenance of the *status quo*, repression and rejection of the demands of colonial peoples for full freedom — political, economic and social.

In the economic field, 10-year development plans initiated

by the Labour government for all colonial territories revealed, on close scrutiny, the maintenance of the old relationships which tied colonies to their metropolitan mother countries as sources of raw materials, foods and minerals, and as markets for manufactured goods. Less than 2 per cent of the total expenditure was earmarked for industrialization and electrification.

This policy of Labour imperialism was candidly stated by one of the Labour government's Tory managers, Lord Trefgarne, chairman of the Colonial (now Commonwealth) Development Corporation. Addressing a group of Liverpool businessmen in 1950, he declared: "The United Kingdom has an annual dollar deficit of £500 million — that is the background against which the productivity of colonial territories must be viewed. If the colonies could raise their overall productivity during the next ten years by £200 million a year, that indeed would be a mercy twice blessed.

"The reason why we look to the colonies is that their products, food and raw materials are more acceptable to the United States than manufactured goods. The total value of imports and manufactured goods into the United States in 1947 from all sources amounted to £250 million. The total imports of food and raw materials were more than four times as great; thanks to tin, rubber, cocoa, etc., the colonial territories overall are playing a good part in the dollar-sterling balance. Obviously therefore, it is sound policy to aim at greatly increased dollar exports of colonial products."

This was the main reason for the protracted, savage and ruthless war in Malaya to capture a "handful of communists, bandits and terrorists" with the aid of Gurkha troops, Dyak headhunters, napalm and terror. Profits and dollar earnings were highest in Malaya. Dollar earnings in 1952 were £166 million as compared with Australia — £109 million; India — £92 million; New Zealand — £31 million; Ceylon — £21 million; West Indies — £17 million; Pakistan — £14 million. No wonder Gammans, a member of the U.K. Parliament, put it so picturesquely: "If we lose Malaya, people in this country will have to go without breakfast."

The war in Malaya caught the British TUC on the horns of a dilemma and led ultimately to the split in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). On the one hand, the TUC was one of the pivots of the WFTU; on the other, it was a pillar of the Labour government. While the latter was conducting the war against the "bandits" and "terrorists", the WFTU was supporting the army of liberation in Malaya and the national liberation movements in other colonial and dependent territories. This proved an embarrassment to the British TUC. Consequently, in 1949, it broke with the WFTU on the excuse that the latter had become Communist-dominated. At the Margate Congress of the TUC, Arthur Deakin, president of the WFTU, said that the federation was "nothing more than another platform and instrument for the furtherance of Soviet policy." But only seven weeks before he had denied that it was "acting as a tool of Soviet imperialism".

These cold war shifts had worldwide repercussions. And because of the close ideological and organizational links between the British Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress and the Caribbean trade union and political leadership, it was inevitable that the latter would join in the chorus of attacks against us.

But these attacks did not cause me any loss of sleep or twinges of conscience. It was not I who had changed. Indeed, it was the West Indian leaders and their opposite numbers in the British Labour Party and the TUC who had. It was they who betrayed us and the cause of humanism and socialism.