

THE JONESTOWN AFFAIR: TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL EXAMINATION*

by

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INTRODUCTION :

To the casual observer the tragic end of the People's Temple Sect on November 18, 1978 will undoubtedly become a living memory, if only because of the fact that the whole affair has escalated to assume bizarre proportions. To the academic, the intellectual, student, or simply the more conscious individual, the Jonestown affair is an important historical point of reference, from which follows a number of profound socio-political implications, especially for the Caribbean region. The aim of this article is to provide a sociological explanation of the People's Temple Sect and to examine some of the implications of this communal experiment for Guyana in particular, and the Caribbean region in general.

SECTARIANISM IN THE REGION :

Religion is a central feature in the lives of Caribbean people. In Guyana itself, there is a profusion of different types of religion which range from the orthodox Roman Catholic and Anglican churches to Hindu, Islamic and Afro-Christian syncretisms. If one were to reflect for a while, one would discover a hive of religious sectarian activity in the region.

Pentecostalism, for example, is very popular throughout the Caribbean. "Pentecostals are fundamentalists, accepting the literal inerrancy of the scriptures" (Wilson, 1970). At their services, many pentecostals begin to "speak in tongues". Speaking in tongues is a highly prized manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, as enunciated by St. Paul in the New Testament.

Pentecostalism is not only popular throughout the Caribbean but also among West Indian migrants in Britain. Some pentecostal movements in the region have become so large, and in some cases, so bureaucratic, that they have literally been transformed from sects into denominations.

Another sect which operated in the Caribbean was the United States based Father Divine Peace Mission. This was a well-known religious movement in the

region. The members of this sect believed absolutely that their leader, the Negro, George Baker, was God. Father Divine had advocated an ageless, deathless existence in "Heaven" — which in actuality was a chain of small cooperatives, set up by Baker himself. The sect faced its greatest challenge when Father Divine died in 1965. His followers could not intelligibly explain the death of their leader, a man who had professed immortality, not only for himself, but for his disciples as well. But beyond this, at his death, the sect suffered from the problem of leadership succession and eventually disintegrated.

One other example of sectarianism in the Caribbean is somewhat less well-known. This sect operates under the umbrella of the Unification Church. The sect was founded in Korea by Prisoner of War, Sun Myung Moon. Incidentally, this religious movement presently operates in Guyana, but also has claims to branches in Trinidad, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados.

Moon's followers preach a gospel known as "The Divine Principle". This doctrine is a mixture of christianity and oriental religions and is centred around Moon, its founder. Many questions have been raised about this sect's activity. For example, its source of income, its funding and its generally covert operations have been under constant investigation. This has forced the Moon followers to take on a low profile in some of the above mentioned territories.

BACKGROUND TO THE PEOPLE'S TEMPLE SECT :

Sect leader Jim Jones had, in his youth, held a loose alliance with the Methodist church in Indianapolis. However, he became disillusioned and subsequently entertained the idea of starting his own church. For a while he pastored a small church without much personal satisfaction, and so he decided to move on, renting a place in another Indianapolis neighbourhood, and giving it a new name — The Community Unity Church.

By 1956, Jones had saved enough money to start the People's Temple Church in Indianapolis. The followers of People's Temple became the object of much criticism and they grew very receptive to the idea of moving to a different location. By 1970, Jones had moved his sect to San Francisco. Three years later he and a church party of twelve visited Guyana in December of 1973, transferring large sums of money from San Francisco to Guyana (Washington Post, 1978). The Temple had expanded its operation in Guyana by 1974. By this time, Jones and his followers had begun creating in the jungles of Guyana the agricultural community known as Jonestown (US Staff Report, 1979). It was in 1974 also that Jones negotiated a lease with the Guyanese government covering 27,000 acres of land in the jungle (Ibid).

By 1977, pressure again began mounting on Jones and his disciples in the United States. This time, criticism came from concerned relatives of the Temple followers, and particularly from the California Press. What finally drove Jones completely to Guyana, together with the majority of his flock in mid-1977, was the publication of a New West Magazine article which exposed many of his operations. He interpreted this expose as part of the mounting conspiracy against him. In July of 1977 then, the People's Temple Sect finally abandoned San Fran-

cisco to set up a commune in Guyana.

For Jones, Guyana was a friendly society which shared with him a common socialist philosophy of life. But it also represented an escape from the seemingly cruel and hostile American society, which according to him, was bent on destroying all that he was attempting to build. And perhaps uppermost in Jones' mind was the fact that Guyana offered his sect an opportunity for a new beginning.

GUYANA'S HOSPITALITY :

One may well ask the question why would the Guyana government welcome the People's Temple Sect? This author would like to suggest that the apparent Guyanese hospitality did not operate independent of political considerations. Of course, the true answer to the above question may perhaps never be known. However, there are some important factors which the government may have considered in deciding to allow the sect to operate in Guyana. Here we may examine only a few.

One of Guyana's main social problems is that of racial conflict. Guyana has always been a society torn by racial strife. In comparison, the People's Temple Sect appeared to outsiders as a model of racial harmony. This particular view of a system of harmonious race relations was also frequently articulated by its leader. It was probably felt, therefore, that Guyanese would look up in admiration to the Jonestown Commune. The implication was that, if it could work for Jones, then it might work for Guyana.

The above assumptions do not necessarily follow. For the Jonestown commune was a completely different and culturally distinct entity from that of the Guyanese society. Of course, beyond this fact, both the commune — which was basically a part of the American society — and the Guyanese society had different and peculiar historical experiences. Hence it does not necessarily mean that if the commune had attained the desired racial harmony, that the Guyanese attempt to emulate the sect would have succeeded.

Jones' espousal of a socialist philosophy must also have impressed Guyanese officials. Moreover, socialism articulated within the framework of a commune is essentially cooperativism in practice. This too, no doubt, must have been favourably considered by the ruling People's National Congress (P.N.C.).

The Guyanese government practices a particular kind of socialism known as Cooperative Socialism; this type of system is enunciated in an article published by an organ of the P.N.C., it states in part that Cooperative Socialism is,

"That form of social and economic organisation in which the stress is laid on working together in harmony as against competition. Socialism in this context is reflected in the use of co-operatives as the basis for political administration of the nation. Cooperativism, therefore is cooperative socialism; the word 'co-operative' signifying the human organisation through which true socialism can be achieved." (McDavid, p. 78).

Finally, the Guyana government would most likely have been favourably disposed to a pioneering group, such as Jones', which sought to operate in the

interior of that country. The ruling party has for a long time been concerned with attempts at attaining hinterland development. Since Jones was prepared to establish his self-reliant community at Port Kaituma, his endeavour would certainly have received the blessings of the P.N.C.

What is being suggested by the above mentioned points is that no single factor was predominant in determining or influencing the decision of the Guyana government to extend a welcome to the sect. However, it is being posited here that the constellation of factors outlined above must have weighed heavily in the minds of the P.N.C. officials when they were giving consideration to the request of Jones for residence for himself and his followers.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF JONESTOWN :

The first point of sociological importance of the Jonestown settlement in Guyana is the development of a commune. David Cooper defined a commune in the following way:

A commune is a micro-social structure that achieves a viable dialectic between solitude and being-with-others; it implies either a common residence for the members or at least a common work and experience area around which residential situations may spread out peripherally; it means that love relationships become diffused between members of the commune network far more than is the case with the family system, and this means, of course, that sexual relationships are not restricted to some socially approved two-persons/man woman arrangement; above all, because this strikes most centrally at repression it means that children should have total free access to adults beyond their biological parental couple. (Cooper, 1972, p. 47).

Basically then, a commune is a settlement where a group of people, not all of one family, share living accommodation and goods. The existence of a commune is usually an indication of the seriousness with which members of a sect or cult view themselves. It is usually also a good indicator of the level of development, maturity and organisation of the sect or cult. People band themselves together in a commune to defend and promote a common interest. The Jonestown commune bore all the above characteristics, in addition to enjoying a certain measure of autonomy. Indeed, the Jonestown commune very closely approximated a total institution, where work and leisure, religion, politics and education, were all collapsed into a single institution ... the commune itself.

TOWARDS CONCEPTUAL CLARITY :

The second point of sociological importance is that the Jonestown affair brought forcefully to the attention of students and teachers of sociology, the need for conceptual clarity in the sociology of religion, with respect to the concepts of "sect" and "cult". Students of sociology would no doubt have been confused by the indiscriminate use of the concepts of sect and cult in newspaper and other coverage of the Jonestown affair. These concepts are not synonymous. To the sociologist, a cult is an almost structureless religious group. Its members are characteristically isolated and alienated from the structure of the wider society and from its formal religious institutions. The development of cults tends to coincide with a rapidly secularising society or one which is generally disorganised

and characteristically anomic. Its members are usually those who have become so alienated from the social structure that they become preoccupied with their own religious experience and relief from the stress and meaninglessness which alienation imposes on them.

Sects are movements of religious protest. A sect's formation represents support of beliefs, ritual practices and moral standards most commonly believed by the sect members to be a return to earlier and purer forms of a particular religion. Membership is voluntary, but individuals are admitted only on proof of their conviction. The sect stands apart from, and in contrast to, groups which are carriers of the dominant societal values. Over time the sect moves to a position of limited or outright isolation from the surrounding social structure or to a state of adaptation to it. The sect, in its pure form, is a protest against and separation from an existent cult, church, or even another sect. A good example of sectarian protest from within an existing religious movement is the Children of God and Divine Light, both of which have developed out of the Unification Church earlier referred to in this article.

A sect has the capacity, if given the opportunity to survive within a particular social system, to transform itself into a church. The Methodist, Adventist and Christian Scientist are good examples of this feature. What is also worthy of note here is that a sect usually stresses egalitarian ideals among its adherents and instills active participation, conformity and personal commitment on the part of its members. Sect members place the highest premium on their religious beliefs and tailor their lives to suit those beliefs. Basically then, the difference between cult and sect is one of organisational structure — the more formally structured organisation being associated with the latter.

We may therefore conclude that the Jonestown religious commune was indeed a sect. It had a clear hierarchical structure. Jones was the undisputed head of the organisation. After the head was a closed group called the "angels." Next, was the planning commission and then the security force — Jones' private armed personnel. There was also a set of trusted aides who assisted in the performance of "faith healing," and finally, at the base of the pyramid, were the rank and file members.

THE PECULIARITY OF THE JONESTOWN SECT :

The religious sect of Rev. Jim Jones was riddled with contradictions. Even though the character of the organisation seemed somewhat introversionist in orientation, it appeared to have had links with the wider Guyanese society. An introversionist sect has isolation as its overriding concern, and this can be seen through the establishment of its own educational and welfare services, and at times even its own medical facilities. These were all features of the Jonestown sect. But Jones also had his headquarters many miles away in Georgetown (the Capital), with its obvious links in the wider Guyanese society.

Another peculiarity of the sect lay in its flirtation with State representatives and State power. If we concede that a sect tends to exhibit withdrawal symptoms and to establish itself on purer beliefs and greater religious valour, then Jones's

sectarian behaviour was quaint to say the least. When he sought permission to enter Guyana, he attempted (and succeeded) to establish credibility on the basis of recommendations from United States representatives. According to Mr. Kit Nascimento, the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister in New York, "Rev. Jones presented references of the highest calibre." (Barbados Advocate News, 21.11.78). These included excerpts from letters written by prominent Americans, including the wife of the United States President, Rosalyn Carter, Vice President, Walter Mondale, HEW Secretary, Joseph Califano, former Senator Sam Erwin and the late Senator Hubert Humphrey.

In the light of the above, the behaviour of Jones' sect must appear odd. This kind of sectarian behaviour was certainly incongruous. We notice, first of all, that the People's Temple sect established relations with prominent Americans, initially for its own ends but subsequently to function in such a way as to appear impressive to countries such as Guyana. Secondly, the sect leadership established ties with prominent P.N.C. officials and also the wider Guyanese community, in order to cement itself in the social structure and organisation of that society. Put differently, even though the behaviour of the People's Temple Sect may have appeared unusual for an introversionist sects, its actions were by no means directionless. On the contrary, the actions were a calculated strategy to make encroachments into the Guyanese society. Beyond such strategy, one may examine other aspects of this sect, particularly its internal contradictions.

THE INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS OF JONES' SECT :

The contradictions within the sect became apparent in Jones' advocacy of non-violence and his practice of enforced conformity. Jones had spoken out publicly against hate, and the use of violence. He reportedly said, "I reject violence" (Kilduff & Javers, 1978, p. 161). Yet it was the allegations of coercive measures to enforce the surrender of property to the religious organisation, and ritual beatings which eventually led to the visit of Congressman Leo Ryan.

In the melodrama of Jonestown, Congressman Leo Ryan's death is unfortunate but he is only incidental to the entire episode. The more important concern was what Ryan represented. To Jones and some of his followers, Ryan was a representative of the evil American capitalist society, which was hell-bent on using its bureaucratic machinery to gain insights into the functioning of the commune's internal organisation. The commune was a decidedly closed system and Jones was not prepared to have it thoroughly investigated, thus running the risk of sacrificing his own power position.

COERCION :

To return to Jones' apparent ambivalence on the question of violence for a limited period, one may make the following point — that coercion itself, as part of enforced conformity, is not unusual among mass movements. There are basically two options open to movements which intend to promote conformity — these are persuasion and coercion. Faced with this kind of option many mass movements choose the latter. The reason being, that coercion is perceived as a more effective and more reliable method than persuasion.

Given the situation involving coercion, where compliance is based largely upon physical deprivation or the threat of physical deprivation, one may be persuaded to conform under duress. Hence, one could say that persuasion in this context, assumes greater efficacy when used within the framework of coercion. Coercion as a method of enforcing conformity can also be sustained through the ritualistic significance which it gains in the context of a religious movement, in such a way that devoted members may not readily perceive such ritual as coercion.

Jones assisted by his trusted disciples exercised power over the People's Temple Sect partly through coercion. This is clearly borne out in the testimony of ex-members and those who survived the Jonestown massacre. His rule was autocratic. A sovereignty of this kind is not surprising, especially to students of the sociology of power. The point being made here, is perhaps poignantly summarised by Roderick Martin (1977, pp. 55-56):-

"In general the greater the amount of power, the greater the probability that compliance will be based upon coercion, the lower the probability that the subordinate will willingly consent to the relationship."

THE COMMUNE'S RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY :

The third point of sociological importance has to do with the commune's religious philosophy. At the level of religious philosophy, an additional contradiction emerges. Rev. Jim Jones perceived himself to be the embodiment of Christ and Lenin — two men who had expounded quite different philosophies; the former a metaphysical one and the latter a materialist philosophy. Jones was, in essence, claiming that his religious doctrine embraced the tenets of both Christianity and Socialism. The difficulty of marrying the Christian and Socialist philosophies is more profound than perhaps Jones may have conceived. This point is implied in the reply of no less a person than Camilo Torres, the revolutionary priest :

"Communism is a philosophical system incompatible with Christianity, although in their socio-economic aspirations the majority of Communists hold precepts not opposed to the Christian faith." (Torres, 1965, pp. 27-28).

To say that one embodies both Christ and Lenin is to demonstrate a most serious personal conflict. Long before the revolution, Lenin had denounced religion as "one of the forms of spiritual oppression which everywhere weighed upon the masses of the people crushed by continuous toil for others by poverty and loneliness (Shurb, 1948). Describing his (Lenin's) "emancipation" from religion, Krztivzhanovsky wrote :

"When he perceived clearly that there was no God, he tore the cross violently from his neck, spat upon it contemptuously and threw it away." (Ibid, 1948, p. 36).

In denouncing religion, Lenin had in fact adopted an ideological position, that of scientific socialism, in which a materialist philosophy became his guiding principle and through which, in his opinion, there was no need for a transcendental point of reference in Christ or God. Scientific socialists cling to the view that as the society moves closer to communism people would rely more and more

on scientific explanation and less on religious, or supernatural, or even superstitious explanations.

"The base for religion will disappear as the socialist transformation of the world will bring the at-present-uncontrolled social and natural forces under the conscious control of the human collective." (Edwards, 1970, p. 7).

In spite of their philosophical differences, Christians and Marxists have begun to recognise that it is still possible for them to assist each other in the process of liberation and humanization. This acknowledgement of each other's contribution to helping mankind has led to, *inter alia*, the consideration of the Christian-Marxist dialogue. The Christian-Marxist dialogue seeks to identify the areas in which both philosophies may borrow from each other in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed in society. Such dialogue has, in turn, given rise to a theology of Liberation articulated mainly in Latin America.

The exchange of compatible ideas or components from one philosophy to another is a completely different thing from attempting to assimilate them into one philosophy/ideology. The philosophical position which Jones articulated was at best problematic and at worst untenable. He seemed to have been attempting a marriage of Christianity and Socialism with no reference to their inherent philosophical differences.

The question of religion has important implications for the Guyanese socialist government. In this regard the Government's position vis-a-vis religion is equivocal, for it was the Burnham government which in the past had declared itself secular. Furthermore, it abandoned church-school education because it did not want to appear to be identifying with any one religion in the country. Yet, strangely enough, it established very friendly ties with the People's Temple commune. It may have been that the Guyana government saw the Jonestown settlement as developmental and, in many ways, exemplary of the socialist work ethic. Indeed as a cooperative venture, the Jonestown settlement was very impressive.

"Of a net lease of 3,000 acres of land, Jim Jones and his People's Temple followers, transplanted from California, were able to clear and use 688 acres within a few years, 301 acres of cultivation, 203 acres for housing and industrial use, 84 acres for such other purposes as roads, reserves and burial ground." (Hamaludin, Advocate News, 19.11.79).

Even if the Jonestown settlement appeared to have done reasonably well at its cooperative venture, one should not be misled by this success. Observers are now in a much better position to regulate the methods used to attain this success. We are also now cognisant of the allegations of Jones' exploitation of his followers and his appropriation of their private funds. However, even in the absence of this knowledge, it would have been simplistic to think that Jones' experimentation with socialism would have provided pointers for the Guyanese society. The building of socialism is much more fundamental than was demonstrated by the People's Temple sect. For in fact, there are certain conditions which are essential for the building of socialism. These include the following:

- (i) The transition of political power from the State to the People;
- (ii) the ownership of the means of production and the development of the productive forces, for the realisation of victory over scarcity;
- (iii) the successful struggles of the revolutionary working class against other classes;
- (iv) the perception with the working class struggle for emancipation from capitalist exploitation;
- (v) the building of working class solidarity;
- (vi) the building of a solid working class party.

In other words, socialism is something which is built from within a society; the impetus must come from within. It is not built by the imposition of an alien community on the social structure of another.

MATERIALIST INTERPRETATION OF THE COMMUNE :

There are clearly other sociological lessons to be learnt from the Jonestown affair. Despite the commune's professed racial harmony the leadership of the sect was predominantly white,¹ while the rank and file of the membership was largely black people²; this was yet another contradiction to surface. Admittedly, there was the isolated accusation that Jones himself did not like black people but rather recognised their usefulness to him and the commune. This particular view should not be hurriedly dismissed. However, to jump to the conclusion that the commune represented a purely racial situation would be to deny consideration of the material basis of the sect's appeal.

It was pointed out at the beginning of this article that a sect usually stresses egalitarian ideals among its adherents. Obviously, the promise of equality for black people in the commune — a reality which was largely denied them in the context of the American society — was clearly an attractive proposition. This, in addition to food, shelter and the protection of the commune, are explanatory factors in promoting an understanding of the appeal which Jones' sect had had for black people. Put differently, Jones' commune had the potential for satisfying the material needs of existence for its black members.

Sociologists of religion have considered the material basis of religious life at one time or another in their writing. Milton Yinger (1961), for example, stated that among the most interesting of the religious developments in the modern world have been sects and cults that have appeared among groups caught in conditions of severe disprivilege. A similar point was, of course, raised much earlier by Max Weber whose comments appear even more relevant to the Temple sect. Weber claims :

"The lowest and most economically unstable strata of the proletariat or permanently impoverished lower middle class groups who are in constant danger of sinking into the proletarian class, are nevertheless readily susceptible to being influenced by religious missionary enterprise." (Weber, 1922).

JIM JONES' CHARISMA:

In addition to the foregoing, one other major feature of the People's Temple Sect is the charisma of its leader, Rev. Jim Jones. Max Weber, one of the classical thinkers of sociology described charisma in the following way —

charismatic authority is wielded by an individual who is able to show, through boundless personal attraction, that he possesses charisma, a unique force of command that overrides in popular estimation all that is bequeath by either tradition or law (Nisbet 1970, p. 143). This is not, however, to suggest that all sects revolve around a charismatic leader. Bryan Wilson is very clear on this issue :

"Sects facilitate the crystallisation of new social groupings, and provide social cohesion within a self-selected community but it is not always the case that sects are charismatically inspired, particularly in industrial societies." (Wilson, 1970).

Jimmy Jones certainly possessed charismatic qualities as can be inferred from the comments of some of his followers, ex-followers and even mere acquaintances. Charisma has to communicate a message to people, which speaks to their unsatisfied needs and therefore opens up the possibility of hope. Jones had the kind of resources, not only to make such promises but to transform them into a living reality. Undoubtedly, it would require some unusual personal attraction for Jones to instill in others, commitment to his type of unorthodox religious doctrine. Jones was able to alter fundamentally, the life patterns of some nine hundred people who entrusted their lives to him.

Charisma notwithstanding, the People's Temple commune demonstrated a classic example of the imbalance of power and the implications for such asymmetry. Jones monopolised the means of power viz the material resources, the finances and the labour power of his followers. His followers, however, were made to operate in a state of dependency. They were never made conscious of the existence of their own power as people. They were socialised in myriad ways into accepting the status of subordinates³. The problem of the imbalance of power within the commune is but a micro level feature of a much more profound macro level phenomenon of the concentration of power within society in general.

Based on information, recorded on tape, of the closing moments of the commune and also from ex-followers and survivors, it would seem as though this charismatic influence of Jones, contributed, at least in part, to the final renouncement of life by some of the Temple's disciples. The charisma of Jones is clearly not being posited here as the sole reason for the acts of suicide committed by Temple followers. Indeed there is usually more than one reason for a suicidal act, irrespective of whatever its manifest and conscious motive may be or may appear to have been (Stengel, 1964, p. 126).

THE SOCIAL CAUSATION OF SUICIDE :

The study of suicide has long been an interest of sociologists. Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology, devoted a lot of his time to the study of suicide in society. His analysis of the causes of suicide are particularly relevant to the suicidal end of the members of the People's Temple commune. The application of a Durkheimian analysis would reveal that members of the sect may have yielded to what he described as altruistic motives. For when such persons renounce life, it is for something they love better than them-

selves — hence optional suicide. In this case, it would more likely be a combination of blind faith and personal commitment to the religious beliefs of the sect. Most mass movements inculcate in their followers a certain readiness to die and unity of action. It is therefore not surprising that we should learn of the "suicide drills" taking place at the Jonestown commune. This exercise was obviously part of the sect followers' anticipatory socialisation. Eric Hoffer's comment in this regard is acutely relevant:

"Dying and killing seem easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game. There is a need for some kind of make-believe in order to face death unflinchingly. To our real, naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for. It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged (and therefore unreal) performance that death loses its frightfulness and finality and becomes an act of make-believe and theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or light hearted dramatic performance." (Hoffer, 1951, p. 64).

A good example of this high level of commitment to which Jones' advocacy of the "dignity of death" had been internalised can be seen in the comment of one survivor. An 84 year old man, Megal De Peana⁴, indicated, in no uncertain terms, his readiness to die for Jim Jones, he said: "I was always willing to die for him (Jones) in his defence". (Barbados Newspaper, 24/11/78).

The attitude adopted by De Peana was further supported by the action of Mike Prokes 31, a survivor of the People's Temple commune. Prokes, after calling a press conference, concluded by stating that the people who committed suicide in Guyana did so because they did not want to return to the United States of America — a society which offered little hope for them. Having stated this, he proceeded to indicate that he was not going to sit idly by and allow his "brothers' and sisters'" deaths to go in vain. With that he left the studio, went nearby and shot himself to death.

This is another example of the extent to which Jones' charismatic influence was internalised — the extent to which members accepted the dictum of the "dignity of death". For when Prokes committed suicide, some four months after the Jonestown holocaust, he must have conceived of his action in precisely the way that Jones had articulated it — as revolutionary suicide, a final act of protest. It is also an indication that Jones' power and influence were considerable. Newsweek magazine described the incident in the following way: "... his (Prokes') death was an unsettling display of Rev. Jim Jones's influence — even from the grave". (Newsweek, 26.3.79).

PERSONALITY CONFLICT:

Jones apparently suffered from serious personality disorders. He knew he wielded charismatic authority but he also understood the impermanent nature of charisma very well. There was no doubt about the devotion of many members to him, but in anticipation of any wavering of loyalty, Jones became pre-occupied with structural maintenance and the consequent personalization of

power within the commune. He allocated to himself massive privileges, and denounced any questioning of his authority.⁵

The Rev. Jim Jones' personality was characterised by what psychologists call "need-fulfilment". His childhood was marked by an apparent lack of parental supervision and its attendant love and affection. Jones grew into an adult who continually sought to obtain from others, the satisfaction of that need of which he was deprived in childhood. However, concerned as he was with the exercise of power, he attempted to elicit this fulfilment of need forcibly. He demanded that people call him "Dad" or "Father". Thomas Dickson commented in the "Guyana Massacre" that "he always said everybody ought to love him and if they didn't, he'd get awfully violent — not physically, but verbally, sometimes cursing". (Krause, 1978).

This kind of behaviour is usually associated with people who become pre-occupied with self. Having a deep interest in the self, need not be pathological, but when a new dimension is added, as evident in Dickson's comment, pathology begins to surface. If we accept the comment of Thomas Dickson as authentic and objective, we may conclude that Jones was indeed attempting to enforce affection. But affection as a human attribute cannot be enforced. It has to be built up through the natural process of human interaction. The structure of social action determines the level of affection or disaffection within interpersonal relationships. Had Jones been less autocratic it may have been easier to provide the appropriate structure of social action conducive to the development of genuine affection. It would appear, however, that Jones' conception of affection bordered on idolatry and to this end he sought, through force, to obtain his desired objective.

At another level, however, this leader was somewhat schizoid. He privately executed what he publicly denounced as wrong and evil. And so, though he may have appeared as a tyrant to those who knew him intimately, to many "outsiders", he played the counterfeit role of a pleasant and affable personality.

IMPLICATIONS OF JONESTOWN FOR GUYANA AND THE CARIBBEAN :

The People's Temple Sect has had a serious impact on the wider Guyanese society. Firstly, it was met by hostile reaction from the established church; from the Amerindian community, which it subsequently attempted to befriend; and from the opposition People's Progressive Party (PPP). In addition, the accusation of the opposition groups viz., the PPP and the Working People's Alliance (WPA) can have serious implications for the Guyanese society. The opposition groups have described the Jonestown commune as "a state within a state," where residents enjoyed privileges vastly superior to those allowed by the authorities to nationals. This accusation is substantiated by the findings of the Staff Investigative Group's report.⁶ To allow the existence of such privilege by one section of the Guyanese society over another would seem to be in contradiction to the spirit and ethics of the socialist ideology.

The People's Temple Sect is not the only unorthodox religious group in Guyana. One has to give consideration to a Federal Bureau of Investigation's report⁷ concerning the hunt for a number of fugitive American criminals who are alleged to be in Guyana operating under the banner of religion. One person is quoted in the report as saying: "The Georgetown Government extends open arms to all nature of cultists and dissidents".

Inevitably the Jonestown affair will, in many ways, reflect on the image of the country in which the disaster occurred; there are certain implications involved and several lessons to be learned by all concerned people. As a result of the destruction of human lives involved, Guyana received a tremendous amount of attention throughout the entire world. Unfortunately this attention was almost always negative. The first implication of Jonestown for Guyana therefore, is the tarnished image of the country in which the entire melodrama was played out.

There are many who feel that the holocaust could have been averted, had the Government of Guyana acted more judiciously in the entire matter. That such a monstrosity could have occurred, says very little for the country's security forces and intelligence gathering network. The Guyana Government's lack of full co-operation with the Staff Investigative Group (Staff Report, p. 16), also aided in compounding the country's negative image abroad.

The Jonestown affair points not only to the government's bureaucratic bungling but also to the frailty of some high ranking officials. The report referred to above, documents certain alleged sexual relations between commune members and members of the government. This behaviour has obvious and dangerous implications for Guyana. It demonstrates the susceptibility of some in high office to compromise, and also offends public morality. Far more vigilance is therefore required to circumvent such scandal.

A further implication of the Jonestown affair is that it forces the government to clarify its position with respect to religion. The ambivalence of the government vis-a-vis its dealings with the Sect requires urgent public explanation. The Jonestown massacre also raises the thorny issue of the government's apparent indifference toward the establishment and growth of the Jonestown commune. It also raises the vexed question of whether the attitude which prevailed during Jones' time will continue in the future.

The Jonestown commune will inevitably have serious repercussions for the Caribbean region as well. First of all, one must consider what does the whole Jonestown affair mean for the advent of other religious sects in Guyana as well as in other Caribbean territories. It is reasonable to believe that reaction to new religious sects (indeed religious movements on the whole, including Rastafarianism), may be characterised by hostility, suspicion and cynicism.

This attitude becomes problematic when it is directed at existing religious sects, as well as the established churches themselves. The social fabric of a

society characterised by such attitudes would be seriously threatened by disintegration and anomie.

In addition to the above, it would appear that the mission of proselytising by the church, sect or cult could be made all the more difficult in the light of such cynicism. The challenge to prove the sincerity and authenticity of all new religious groups may become a much more serious proposition in the future.

At another level, since Jones claimed some allegiance to socialism, one can almost anticipate the way in which anti-socialists may use this occurrence as a form of ridicule, especially at this time, when Socialism itself is on trial in the Caribbean. Of course, anti-religious persons may also distort the Jonestown affair for their own ends.

Finally, if we assume that the Guyana government knew nothing about the internal structure and functioning of the People's Temple Sect, or about its possible links with other social and/or political organisations, then we may reasonably suggest to the government that it should exercise greater discretion in welcoming pioneering groups, be they religious or political. This perhaps may be a useful position for regional governments to adopt in their relations to other foreign groups in the future. However, should these pioneering groups be expressly religious in orientation, as Jones' group was, then they would obviously present regional governments with the difficult task of striking a balance between national interest and security, and individual freedom of conscience constitutionally guaranteed. This is a very delicate matter in which discretion becomes an urgent priority.

CONCLUSION :

There are obviously many other important sociological factors to be analysed in the Jonestown affair. This article was not intended to be an exhaustive sociological examination of the religious commune. The People's Temple Sect was clearly not a purely religious organisation but embraced a very potent political and economic dimension. Hence analyses of the sect cannot be made by sociologists exclusively. Contributions to an understanding of the entire experiment at Jonestown should come from political scientists, political economists, psychologists, theologians, lawyers, psychiatrists and others.

Nevertheless, in our various analyses we should be careful not to allow our sometimes cold, clinical assessments to dull our sensitivity to the fact of mass human sacrifice on the one hand, and on the other, continued suffering by affected relatives of Temple followers, in the aftermath of the Jonestown affair.

The frightening possibility is that Jones may be one of many of his kind all over the world, who may not yet have surfaced because of lack of initiative or opportunity. Insensitivity to human suffering in this context may result in complacency and this may in turn make us less vigilant than we should be in identifying the Jim Joneses who may be currently operating among us.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Nordheimer, Jon — New York Times, November 30, 1978.
2. See Rhoden, Bill — The Baltimore Sun, December 28, 1978.
3. See the Staff Investigative Group Report for details of Jones' exercise of control over the psyches of his followers.
4. De Peana was receiving treatment for rheumatism at the Georgetown Hospital at the time of the fatal end of the commune's members.
5. Robert Houston, Jnr., had been beaten severely for querying points of doctrine — See Krause, Charles, *Guyana Massacre*, Berkley Publishing Corp., 1978.
6. Staff Investigative Report, op. cit., p. 32. Also, see New York Times, December 24, 1978.
7. New York Post, December 5, 1978. Also cited in Caribbean Contact, February 1979.

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