

THE CAMPAIGN
FOR
SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY
IN GUYANA

**

Source Documents of the People's
Progressive Party
(1965-1991)

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[Compiler and Editor]

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Dedication and Thanks

This volume is the brainchild of the late Mrs. Janet Jagan, one of the great leaders and a founder-member of the People's Progressive Party. In early 2009, she suggested to me that the Party, as part of its 60th anniversary commemoration, should publish its main documents to show how it carried out its campaign to promote its socialist ideology while simultaneously waging a struggle to win back democracy for Guyana. After a series of telephone conversations and e-mail contacts, we both agreed to the compilation of the documents in this volume. Mrs. Jagan died in March 2009 before the editing of this work was completed.

To her everlasting memory I dedicate this volume.

I must also thank the Cheddi Jagan Research Centre for providing to me the text of most of the documents in this collection. And my special appreciation goes to my brother, Jamaladeen Ishmael, who assisted me most diligently in proof-reading the text and checking other details of an editorial nature.

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Caracas, 2010

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Introduction

In December 1964, despite winning the national elections with the highest proportion (almost 46 percent) of votes under the British-imposed electoral system of proportional representation, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was replaced as the government of Guyana (then British Guiana) by a coalition of the People's National Congress (PNC) and the United Force (UF), which together polled more than the 50 percent of votes. As a result, the PPP was relegated to the Opposition, and was kept in that position by a series of fraudulent elections in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985, all managed and conducted by the PNC regime.

Despite being forced in the Opposition for such a long period, the PPP maintained its close contacts with its supporters throughout the country and remained a formidable political force under the leadership of Dr. Cheddi Jagan. And due to its own struggles, locally and internationally, the party, working with other political allies, was able to force concessions for free and fair elections at the beginning of the 1990s from the PNC regime. Eventually, in the first free and fair elections in almost three decades, a PPP-led government was elected to power in October 1992. Democracy was finally restored to Guyana.

From the first day of 1950 when the PPP was first established, it stated firmly that its objective was to establish socialism as the political and economic system for Guyana. The Party was mass-based and drew multi-racial support in both the urban and rural areas from workers, farmers, small business-people, a large section of the middle class. Many of its leaders, since then, were "socialists" or "Marxist-Leninists".

The Party's socialist ideology drew the wrath of both British and American imperialism, as well as local pro-capitalist political groups in 1953, and then after 1957 from the People's National Congress (PNC) and the United Force (UF). Ironically, the PNC, while claiming to be "socialist" was the PPP's leading challenger and openly opposed the pro-socialist policies of the PPP governments from 1957 to 1964. The PNC also accepted covert financial support from the US government after 1962 to assist in the political and extra-political efforts to remove the PPP from the government.

Despite its removal from power after the 1964 elections, the PPP, true to its principles, never abandoned its objective of striving towards the establishment of socialism in Guyana. It constantly agitated on behalf the working people and urged the PNC-led regimes from 1965 to abandon its pro-capitalist policies and to establish a tri-sectoral economy involving the state, private enterprise and cooperatives.

Interestingly, the PNC regime, after 1973, began to propagate some similar ideas, as it gradually began to promote itself as a "socialist" party based on the tenets of "Marxism-Leninism".

However, the PNC's brand of socialism was proclaimed as "cooperative socialism", a utopian idea in which the cooperatives were touted as the main engine of economic growth. "Cooperative socialism" never brought any practical economic benefits to the vast majority of the Guyanese people, but its propagation by the PNC only assisted to distort the ideas of Marxist socialist ideology.

The Guyanese people's living conditions deteriorated drastically under the rule of the PNC, no doubt also due to the fact that the PNC refused to practice democracy, and unashamedly rigged national and local government elections to maintain dictatorial powers.

The PPP had always maintained that socialism could not be built without democracy, and ever since it was removed from power through the machinations of the British-imposed proportional representation electoral system, it maintained a valiant struggle for the return of democracy in Guyana. At first it waged a lone battle, but gradually other political and social forces join the struggle. The Party mobilised its supporters all over the country, some of whom sacrificed their lives for the cause. International support from the West was also won, particularly

after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the PPP was no longer seen as a “communist threat”.

This collection of PPP documents gives a clear picture of the Party’s campaign for socialism and democracy in Guyana from 1965 to 1991 — the period when it languished in the opposition. Numerous PPP documents relevant to this campaign exist, including reports to county conferences and special national party conferences, including the report to the 1969 special conference when the Party announced that it was transforming itself into a Marxist-Leninist organisation, and those of other regional and county conferences in the 1970s on opening political dialogue with the PNC. However, issues raised in those regional, county and special conferences are generally included in the main documents in this volume.

These documents — the congress reports and the papers on “critical support” and the proposal for a “National Patriotic Front” — not only analysed the political, economic and social conditions existing in the specific periods, but also discussed the political developments in various regions and countries, and showed how they influenced the political situation in Guyana. They also provide a vivid description of the PPP’s strategy as an opposition party in maintaining its links with its grassroots support while conducting a political struggle to win support for its ideology and, most importantly, working towards building alliances to combat a dictatorial regime and restore democracy to Guyana.

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